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**Christine Ann Bielecki**

**British Infantry Morale during the Italian Campaign,  
1943-1945**

**University College London**

**Ph.D. History**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Second World War Italian campaign has long been overshadowed by the Normandy landings. Yet it was the longest campaign in Europe in which British forces were involved, and the first to be crowned with success.

Much has been written about the strategic and tactical aspects of the Allies' Mediterranean policy, and the Italian campaign within that context, but little attention has been paid to the soldiers who executed that policy. It was principally an infantry and artillery war: the topography of Italy mitigated against any larger-scale use of armour. This thesis examines the morale, the willingness to fight, of the British front-line soldier, the infantryman, and the factors which influenced his morale during the 22 months of the campaign, and it looks at the army's response to fluctuations in morale, both at institutional and battalion levels.

Morale is never constant; it varies across time, across units and the individuals who make up the units, and there is ample evidence to suggest that morale in Italy, in the winter of 1944-1945, was seriously degraded. But the evidence also indicates that as high as the desertion figures were, absenteeism was not in the main the result of men's unwillingness to fight, a symptom of cowardice and self-interest. On the contrary, many deserters were men who had fought too hard, for too long, as the result of a series of political and military decisions over which they had no control, but whose morale was robust enough, in the end, to accomplished their goal.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAI	Allied Armies in Italy
A/Adjt	Assistant Adjutant
ADAG (P)	Assistant Deputy Adjutant General (Personnel)
ADMS	Assistant Director of Medical Services
ADS	Advance Dressing Station
AFHQ	Allied Forces Headquarters
AKS	Army Kinema Corps
BAN	British Army Newspaper Unit
Bde	Brigade
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
Bn	Battalion
BNAF	British North African Force
CAB*	Cabinet Papers
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CCS	Casualty Clearing Station
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
C-in-C	Commander in Chief
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CMAC**	Contemporary Medical Archives Collection
CMF	Central Mediterranean Force
CO	Commanding Officer
CMP	Corps of Military Police

<b>Coy</b>	<b>Company</b>
<b>CPA</b>	<b>Central Pool of Artistes</b>
<b>CRU</b>	<b>Corps Reinforcement Unit</b>
<b>CSM</b>	<b>Company Sergeant Major</b>
<b>CVWW</b>	<b>Council of Voluntary War Work</b>
<b>DAG</b>	<b>Deputy Adjutant General</b>
<b>DCM</b>	<b>Distinguished Conduct Medal</b>
<b>DDMS</b>	<b>Deputy Director of Medical Services</b>
<b>Det</b>	<b>Detachment</b>
<b>DF</b>	<b>Defensive Fire</b>
<b>DMT</b>	<b>Director of Military Training</b>
<b>Div</b>	<b>Division</b>
<b>EFI</b>	<b>Expeditionary Forces Institute</b>
<b>ENSA</b>	<b>Entertainments National Service Association</b>
<b>E.T. Packs</b>	<b>Early Treatment Packs</b>
<b>FDS</b>	<b>Field Dressing Station</b>
<b>Fd. Amb</b>	<b>Field Ambulance</b>
<b>FGCM</b>	<b>Field General Court Martial</b>
<b>GHQ</b>	<b>General Headquarters</b>
<b>GOC</b>	<b>General Officer Commanding</b>
<b>GRO</b>	<b>General Routine Order</b>
<b>IRTD</b>	<b>Infantry Replacement Training Depot</b>
<b>IWM</b>	<b>Imperial War Museum</b>
<b>JAG</b>	<b>Judge Advocate General</b>

<b>LIAP</b>	<b>Leave in Addition to Python</b>
<b>L of C</b>	<b>Lines of Communication</b>
<b>LSI</b>	<b>Landing Ship Infantry</b>
<b>MC</b>	<b>Military Cross</b>
<b>MEF</b>	<b>Middle East Force</b>
<b>MM</b>	<b>Military Medal</b>
<b>NA</b>	<b>National Archives</b>
<b>NCO</b>	<b>Non-Commissioned Officer</b>
<b>LHCMA</b>	<b>Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives</b>
<b>MBU</b>	<b>Mobile Bath Unit</b>
<b>MI Room</b>	<b>Medical Inspection Room</b>
<b>MO/RMO</b>	<b>Medical Officer/Regimental Medical Officer</b>
<b>NAAFI</b>	<b>Navy, Army &amp; Air Force Institutes</b>
<b>NYD</b>	<b>Not Yet Diagnosed</b>
<b>Offr</b>	<b>Officer</b>
<b>OR</b>	<b>Other Rank</b>
<b>ORQM</b>	<b>Orderly Room Quartermaster</b>
<b>PA Centre</b>	<b>Prophylactic Ablution Centre</b>
<b>PS/p.s.</b>	<b>Penal Servitude</b>
<b>RA</b>	<b>Royal Artillery</b>
<b>RAMC</b>	<b>Royal Army Medical Corps</b>
<b>RAOC</b>	<b>Royal Army Ordnance Corps</b>
<b>RAP</b>	<b>Regimental Aid Post</b>
<b>RASC</b>	<b>Royal Army Service Corps</b>

<b>Rft</b>	<b>Reinforcement</b>
<b>RP</b>	<b>Regimental Police</b>
<b>RTU</b>	<b>Returned to Unit</b>
<b>RUSI</b>	<b>Royal United Services Institute</b>
<b>SIB</b>	<b>Special Investigation Branch</b>
<b>SSAFA</b>	<b>Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Family Association</b>
<b>TCV</b>	<b>Troop Carrying Vehicle</b>
<b>TOS</b>	<b>Taken On Strength</b>
<b>Tps</b>	<b>Troops</b>
<b>WE</b>	<b>War Establishment</b>
<b>WO*</b>	<b>War Office Papers</b>
<b>WOSB</b>	<b>War Office Selection Board</b>

**\*Archival references bearing these prefixes originate from the National Archives, London**

**\*\* Archival references bearing these prefixes originate from The Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine**



## **GLOSSARY OF OPERATIONAL CODE NAMES**

<b>ANVIL</b>	Allied Invasion of South of France, August 15 <sup>th</sup> , 1944
<b>AVALANCHE</b>	US Fifth Army's Landing at Salerno, September 9 <sup>th</sup> , 1943
<b>BAYTOWN</b>	Eighth Army's Landing in Calabria, September 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 1943
<b>DIADEM</b>	Allied Spring Offensive in Italy, May 11 <sup>th</sup> , 1944
<b>GRAPESHOT</b>	Allied Spring Offensive in Italy, April 9 <sup>th</sup> , 1945
<b>HUSKY</b>	Allied Invasion of Sicily, July 10 <sup>th</sup> , 1943
<b>OLIVE</b>	Eighth Army's Gothic Line Offensive, August 25 <sup>th</sup> , 1944
<b>OVERLORD</b>	Allied Invasion of Normandy, June 6 <sup>th</sup> , 1944
<b>TORCH</b>	Allied Landings in North Africa, November 8 <sup>th</sup> , 1942



Source: Carver, Field Marshal Lord, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the War in Italy 1943-1945* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2001)

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the wide-ranging literature on the Italian campaign, none of the existing works have explored the evolution of morale in the campaign to any great extent and depth. This thesis is intended to help fill this gap by examining the factors that degraded and sustained the morale of the British infantry serving with the Eighth and Fifth Armies in Sicily and Italy during the Second World War. It focuses on infantrymen because, according to all the primary and secondary literature cited, it was their morale which was particularly problematic. The role of the infantryman in battle has been described as “dangerous, arduous, unspectacular and unrewarding”.<sup>1</sup> “No other soldier probably is called upon so frequently as the Infantryman to endure prolonged and unrelieved stress in war under the worst physical conditions.”<sup>2</sup> Italy was, par excellence, an infantry and artillery war. It is a particularly good campaign, therefore, in which to site a study of the morale of the men at the sharp end of battle.

“Morale is to the physical as three is to one,” according to Napoleon’s famous maxim.<sup>3</sup> More than 150 years later Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery echoed this sentiment when he wrote, in 1944, that “the more fighting I see, the more I am convinced that the big thing in war is morale ... morale is probably the most important single factor in war ...”<sup>4</sup> High morale has traditionally been associated with the willingness to fight, and the importance of bellicosity in the successful prosecution of warfare has always been recognised. Yet morale is not an easy concept to define, changing as warfare itself

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier A.B. McPherson, *Discipline* (London: The War Office, 1950) p. 51

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Lt.-Col. J.H.A. Sparrow, *Morale* (London: The War Office, 1949), Notes on the Conduct of War and the Infantry Division in Battle, November 1944, p. 4

changes. S.L.A. Marshall, who led American Historical Teams during the Second World War and oversaw the 'Men Against Fire' study, described morale as "the whole complex of an army's thoughts."<sup>5</sup> Field Marshal Earl Wavell, on the other hand, described it as "the inward, spiritual side of discipline."<sup>6</sup> Yet strictness of discipline, in its narrowest sense, may conceal serious defects in morale.<sup>7</sup> In the Second World War only a comparatively small proportion of the Army found itself in action, and then, in general, only for a small proportion of its time. Seventy five per cent of troops never served in the front line.<sup>8</sup> Because of this Lt.-Col. John Sparrow, who was attached to the Adjutant General's office, and was Secretary to the Morale Committee of the Executive Committee of the Army Council during the Second World War, wanted to avoid a definition limited to the disciplined reaction to battle by front line troops when he wrote the official War Office report on the subject after the war. He believed that while high morale tended to be associated with fighting spirit or sheer courage, and with troops in the front line who were subject to danger and hardship, the importance of maintaining morale among administrative troops was not always realised, even though the men in the rear had to contend with inaction, monotony and boredom. Sparrow therefore defined morale as "the attitude of the soldier towards his employment".<sup>9</sup> The focus of this thesis is the morale of one particular kind of soldier, the infantryman, during one campaign in the Second World War, and morale, for this purpose, is defined as the infantryman's attitude to his employment as a frontline fighting man.

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<sup>5</sup> S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (New York: William Morrow & Co. Inc., 1947), p. 158

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in McPherson, *Discipline*, p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Sparrow, *Morale*, p. 2

It was only with the introduction of mass armies and industrialized warfare between 1914-1918 that British military authorities first confronted, in a serious and sustained manner, the problems associated with understanding what factors degraded and improved the morale of a mass citizens' army. In 1920 the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell-Shock", chaired by Lord Southborough, met to collate the expert knowledge derived by the Services' medical authorities and the medical profession from their experience of the war, with a view to recommending for future use what could be proposed to guard against the re-occurrence of so-called "shell-shock". Cases of battle exhaustion had been chronicled as far back as the early Greeks.<sup>10</sup> It was during the First World War, however, that "shell-shock" took hold of the British public's imagination. "Shell shock" was a psychological disturbance caused by prolonged exposure to active warfare, in particular provoked by the experience of being under bombardment. Its symptoms ranged from irritability, the inability to sleep or take decisions, crying and shivering, to a gamut of nervous disorders, neuroses and, in extreme cases, hysterical manifestations including blindness, deafness, paralysis and amnesia. By late 1915, the Army Council reluctantly recognised the existence of "shell shock" but, despite all the evidence to the contrary, many military men continued to believe that "shell shock" was principally a manifestation of cowardice, and an excuse for desertion. Public concern about wartime executions of "shell-shocked" soldiers led to the abolition, in the face of Army Council objections, of the death penalty for desertion under fire in 1930.<sup>11</sup> The death penalty, however, was retained for treachery and mutiny.

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<sup>8</sup> D. Englander & T. Mason, *The British Soldier in World War II* (Warwick Working Papers in Social History (n.d.), p. 2

<sup>9</sup> Sparrow, *Morale*

<sup>10</sup> W. Holden, *Shell Shock: The Psychological Impact of War* (London: Channel 4 Books, 1998) p. 7

<sup>11</sup> McPherson, *Discipline*, p. 54

Every witness before the Southborough Committee concurred that “shell-shock” was a misnomer for the condition they had seen among troops in the trenches, which were principally cases of psycho-neurosis or mental breakdown. In 1922, after 41 sittings and the examination of 59 expert witnesses, the Committee published its findings.<sup>12</sup> Many of its expert witnesses had commented on the fact that well-disciplined troops with high morale were less likely to suffer from “shell-shock” than those with poor morale. Dr. Hurst, who had been the Officer-in-Charge of the Special Neurological Hospital, Seale Hayne, for instance, pointed out that “high morale undoubtedly tended to lessen the incidence of ‘shell-shock’ because morale is the acquired quality which in highly-trained troops counterbalances the influence of self-preservation.”<sup>13</sup> The Consultant Neurologist for the British Armies in France, Gordon Holmes, believed that to increase in every way possible the morale of the troops was the secret of all preventative measures.<sup>14</sup> The first of the Committee’s recommendations on “Prevention” stated: “Every possible means should be taken to promote morale, esprit de corps and a high standard of discipline.”<sup>15</sup> The Committee then posed the question: What is morale? And answered:

Morale is confidence in one’s self and confidence in one’s comrades. It is collective confidence, the spirit of a good team at football. Morale can be, and has to be, created. It is the product of continuous and enthusiastic training.

Training must be continuous. The more a man is trained the more skilful he becomes; the more skilful he becomes, the more his confidence increases. If a man knows he can do a thing well, he develops confidence in himself. If he knows that his comrades are equally skilful, he gains confidence in them. His confidence is multiplied. Confidence is both contagious and inspiring.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock”* (hereinafter *The Southborough Committee Report*) *House of Commons Reports: Accounts and Papers: (2) Army: Session 7 February 1922–4 August 1922. Vol. XII* (London: HMSO 1922)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208

The Committee offered several recommendations on how to maintain that confidence. Training was obviously right at the top of the list. "Training should be sufficiently prolonged to ensure that the soldier is not only physically fit and efficient, but also that he has had time to acquire such a standard of morale as will enable him to put the welfare of his unit before his own personal safety."<sup>17</sup> Every witness before the Southborough Committee also "laid stress on the important role played by officers in setting a good example ... 'the men are what their officers make them'."<sup>18</sup>

The Committee made its recommendations, but little was done to implement them between the wars. The assumption of most regular officers seems to have been that good unit administration and discipline would suffice to maintain morale in any future conflict, and very little thought was given to the problem of morale in a citizen army, even though the Southborough Committee had explicitly stated that the incidence of nervous disorders, neurosis and hysteria were considerably higher among conscripts than regular soldiers.<sup>19</sup> General Sir Ronald Adam, who became Adjutant-General in May 1941, was forced to admit that "I was as much to blame as anyone, for I was a chief instructor at the Staff College for more than three years and commandant for a few months. I can recall only one lecture dealing with morale in a conscript army."<sup>20</sup>

Yet the vast increase in army personnel at the beginning of the Second World War was largely achieved through conscription. In September 1939 the actual strength of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 190

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 151

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>20</sup> Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London (hereinafter LHCMA) Adam Papers 8, p. 2



Regular British Army, following the introduction of the Military Training Bill in April of that year, and a strong recruiting drive, was 12,000 officers and 180,000 men.<sup>21</sup> The number of soldiers increased dramatically as full mobilisation of society was achieved. By January 1<sup>st</sup> 1943, the approximate effective strength of British troops (excluding Indian, Colonial and Dominion Forces) was just over 2.5 million: 405,600 were stationed in the Middle East and Malta; 186,600 in India; 150,000 in North Africa; 86,400 in Persia and Iraq; and 1,690,000 remained stationed in the UK.<sup>22</sup> The change from civilian to soldier was unwelcome to many men, and the desertion figures (one of the key indicators of morale) for October 1940 to September 1941, when most conscripts were stationed in the UK but were away from their families, perhaps for the first time in their lives, were the highest of the War. In those 12 months 22,248 men deserted – about one per cent of the total average strength of the army.<sup>23</sup>

Most conscripts, no matter how long they remained in the Army, and for some their Army service dragged on for seven years, remained civilians at heart. There was never the sense of commitment so evident among the early volunteer army of the First World War. The conscripts of the Second World War had grown up in a cynical age, the legacy of the 1914–1918 carnage, and the subsequent debasing of all military institutions, which saw Army officers either as “chinless wonders” or “Colonel Blimps”.<sup>24</sup> After three years at war “the average conscripted soldier seems to remain to a greater extent than is necessary a civilian, and there is a regrettable tendency to think of officers, ‘the authorities’ and ‘the Army’ as

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<sup>21</sup> LHCMA Adam Papers II. Notes for S. of S. Estimate Speech, n.d.

<sup>22</sup> LHCMA, Adam Papers IV, n.d.

<sup>23</sup> R.H. Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) p. 273.

<sup>24</sup> S.P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) p. 77

an impersonal 'They'."<sup>25</sup> This attitude was not noticeably amended during the course of the war and as late as September 1944 it was still noted in a War Office Memorandum that "there exists in the citizen forces a strong reaction against traditional service outlook."<sup>26</sup>

The question of how to motivate these "civilians in khaki",<sup>27</sup> how to meld them into a fighting force which could take on the well-trained and successful Wehrmacht, was to exercise the minds of the War Office a great deal during the War. Following the series of reversals suffered by the British Forces in the first years of the Second World War – the evacuation of Dunkirk (May 1940), the evacuation of British Forces from Norway (June 1940) and from Crete (May 1941), the fall of Singapore (February 1942), and of Tobruk (June 1942) – the mood and confidence of the Army, both abroad and at home, was to cause concern not only to the Army Council but also to the War Cabinet, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill's faith in the Britain's military capability was seriously undermined.<sup>28</sup> During the first two and a half years of the war no member of the Army Council was officially responsible for morale. Following the fall of Singapore in February 1942, however, and the ensuing crisis of confidence and fear that the army's morale was dangerously low, the Army Council was forced to consider much more closely the fighting spirit – or lack thereof – of its soldiers. As a result, the Morale Committee, which came within the purview of the Adjutant-General, whose department was responsible for army personnel, was established in March 1942, with Brigadier E.J. O'Donnell assuming

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<sup>25</sup> National Archives (hereinafter NA) WO 163/161 War Office Committee on Morale in the Army Report to the Committee, August-October, 1942

<sup>26</sup> NA WO 163/245 *Morale (Far Eastern) Inter-Services Committee* Memorandum to the Committee by Air Vice Marshal R.V. Goddard on Conditions and Requirements in India and South East Asia, 23 September, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> NA WO 259/62 *Morale* Note 1a, hand-written, anonymous, entitled "Notes on the Spirit of the Army".

<sup>28</sup> T. Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) p. 23

responsibility for the work of the morale section.<sup>29</sup> Assessment of morale for the subsequent quarterly Committee Reports was drawn firstly from reports submitted through commands from divisional and district commanders and secondly from the very full reports submitted by the Army Mail Censorship authorities on the mail of troops at home and overseas. These reports were digests of the unsolicited opinions expressed in soldiers' letters on all topics, constant and ephemeral, which might effect morale. They were supported by very full verbatim extracts from the letters grouped under subject headings. The names of the writers were invariably excluded by the Censor and in no single instance was disciplinary action taken against the letter writer.<sup>30</sup> A further source, initially, was a summary of letters of complaint and enquiry received by Professor John Hilton, who gave weekly broadcasts on the BBC and answered questions in the *News of the World*. His broadcasts were addressed primarily to the families of men in the services, but were very popular with the troops as well.

From these reports, Lt.-Col Sparrow, Secretary of the Morale Committee, was able to list a number of factors that he believed influenced morale, although there was obviously some cross-over in the various categories. Generally they reflected the areas highlighted by the Southborough Committee, but they exhibited more breadth. The views of officers and doctors before the Southborough Committee were augmented by the input of the Second World War conscripts themselves and included more welfare-related influences on morale, in line with the changing social and political climate during the war. Sparrow cited, in particular: the general, and the immediate military situation; confidence in leaders (both in the unit and in the High Command); efficiency of training and weapons; efficiency of unit

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<sup>29</sup> LHMCA, Adam Papers 8, Morale & Discipline.

administration; discipline in unit; comradeship, pride in unit and esprit de corps; consciousness of fitness for the job in hand and understanding what it was; efficient “Q” Services, that is quarters, mail, rations; and “A” Services, covering medical, entertainment, newspapers, canteen and “welfare”; the efficiency of machinery for the supply of reinforcements; the administrative rules and routine regulations (home leave, promotion, etc.); and wider, including political, considerations, e.g. the attitude of the soldier towards the cause for which he was fighting and towards the government which directed the conduct of the war and determined the lot of the ex-soldier on demobilization.<sup>31</sup>

Not all of these were of equal importance to front-line infantry soldiers. For them morale was most positively influenced by immediate concerns such as the successful outcome of operations in which they were involved; low casualty rates; their own appreciation of their particular military situation and their hope that their own side – especially the artillery – would destroy the enemy before the enemy could retaliate; the ability of their officers and NCOs to lead them effectively and maintain good levels of training and discipline; the efficiency of their weapons; the knowledge that, if wounded, medical assistance would be prompt and efficient; the speed and quality of reinforcements; strong esprit de corps and comradeship/small group cohesion; good rations while in the line; and comfortable living conditions, with sufficient hot food, washing facilities, entertainment and leisure time out of the line. Regular contact with home through a steady supply of national and local newspapers, radio broadcasts and letters to and from loved ones, arranged by efficient “Q” and “A” services, was also vital to conscripts who remained civilians at heart.

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<sup>30</sup> Sparrow, *Morale*, p. 29

The close correlation between morale and the incidence of breakdown, noted by the Southborough Committee, was also recognized in the Second World War. One psychiatrist wrote:

It may be said of all cases of psychiatric breakdown in warfare: that they have failed in their job as soldiers; have dissolved their comradeship in arms; and have experienced a breakdown in morale.... As a group they are further characterised by the extreme infrequency of wounds, by markedly lower incidence amongst officers and amongst troops of high morale .. ... The soldier's morale prior to his breakdown may be high or low ... In most cases morale is at a low ebb at the time of the breakdown.<sup>32</sup>

There is some question, however, as to whether it was low morale which produced breakdowns, or whether, conversely, it was the onset of the breakdown which brought about low morale. One psychiatrist, Dr. Emanuel Miller, pointed out that, in the case of the First World War:

There is official evidence to show that in a very large proportion of cases, before the breakdown, the man has done credit to himself and his unit. Against overwhelming mental forces calling him to abandon his struggle to fight on, he has frequently carried on. In fact the proportion of men with neuroses who received decorations for valour showed little difference from the proportion of other soldiers who received decorations.<sup>33</sup>

All men have a breaking point. Lord Moran, who had fought in the First World War and had served as Churchill's physician during the Second World War, wrote that each man had a "bank of courage". It could be augmented, during periods of success such as El Alamein, when morale would become heightened. Courage, however, he wrote, "is will-power,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 3-4

<sup>32</sup> The Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine, Contemporary Medical Collection (hereinafter CMAC), GC/192/18 Major H.A. Palmer, "The Problem of the P. & N. Casualty – a Study of 12,000 Cases", Appendix "E", pp. 3-4 (n.d.)

<sup>33</sup> Dr. E. Miller, quoted in Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p 14

whereof no man has an unlimited stock: and when in war it is used up, he is finished.”<sup>34</sup>

One Southborough Committee witness opined that:

...Even the bravest man cannot endure to be under fire for more than a certain number of consecutive days, even if the fire be not very heavy. Lord Byng, I am pretty sure, found this out in South Africa, after 80 or 90 days. My brother, Brigadier-General Charles Fortescue, had, in his column in South Africa, a Canadian officer who was a proverb for daring; but even this officer broke down for the time after every enterprise of any continuance and needed a fortnight's rest from fire to restore him. To this fact I attribute the occasional notices of the mysterious disappearance of tried old soldiers in former wars.<sup>35</sup>

By the Second World War, British medical authorities, like most of the expert witnesses in front of the Southborough Committee, found the term “shell shock” to be a misnomer. The official preference was that forward medical officers used NYD (N), for Not Yet Diagnosed (Nervous), although a wide variety of terms were used, including psychoneurosis, anxiety neurosis, battle stress, battle exhaustion or, simply, exhaustion.<sup>36</sup> In the Second World War battle fatigue among British troops usually occurred in 200-240 aggregate combat days, where 10 combat days were taken as equivalent to 17 calendar days.<sup>37</sup> *The Journal of Neurology* reported in 1942 that “a man reached his peak effectiveness in the first 90 days of combat. After this his efficiency fell away ...”<sup>38</sup> But in Tunisia, doctors compiling records of the men passing through their care, found that after 30 days of continuous fighting, 98% of infantrymen would break down.<sup>39</sup> It was not only the duration, but also the type of fighting, in particular static warfare, that was an important consideration in general levels of infantry morale. One expert witness before the Southborough Committee,

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<sup>34</sup> Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (Garden City Park, New York: Avery Publishing Group Inc., 1987) p. xvi.

<sup>35</sup> The Honorable John Fortescue, Historian of the British Army, The Southborough Committee Report, p. 9

<sup>36</sup> T. Copp & B. McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990) Footnote, p. 22

<sup>37</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 172

<sup>38</sup> Holden, *Shell Shock*, p. 101

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

General Lord Horne, considered that “shell shock” became a serious factor on the Western Front due to the particular character of the war. “The high explosives and bombardment had never been known before. He thought that in moving warfare we should not experience anything like it.”<sup>40</sup> Another witness, Dr. Hurst, was of the same opinion: “I think what produces ‘shell shock’ much more than the sudden danger is prolonged danger in a static position, where the man cannot get away from it. It is the wear and tear and slow sapping of his nervous powers.”<sup>41</sup> This was extremely important for the morale of soldiers in Italy during the Second World War since a great deal of the fighting there resembled the trench warfare of The Western Front. In his study of *The Mystery of Courage*, William Miller mused on different forms of courage, the masculine and the feminine. “Men did well with the glorious sacrifice, the greater love of the falling-on-the grenade variety, but withdrew between times. Such grand gestures were signatored male – a one-shot burst ending in death or exhaustion.”<sup>42</sup> Traditionally women were allowed the courage of endurance.<sup>43</sup> The inaction forced upon men by static warfare, with no chance of immediate retaliation, shredded nerves. The added burden in these circumstances was the inability to answer the fight or flee adrenalin-fuelled imperative, leading to both physical and mental distress.

The correlation between desertion and poor morale/neuroses was well-established. Robert Ahrenfeldt was the Deputy Assistant Director of Army Psychiatry in the Second World War. Subsequently he wrote the semi-official study of *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War*. In this he included, in his chapter on morale, the findings of a survey,

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<sup>40</sup> The Southborough Committee Report, p. 6

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 29

<sup>42</sup> W.I. Miller, *The Mystery of Courage* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 248



*The Study in the Psychology of Desertion and Absenteeism in Wartime, and its Relation to the Problem of Morale*, based on interviews with 2,000 deserters in the British Army of the Rhine. The author of the study, Colonel Penton, noted that when the morale of a unit in war ceased to hold a soldier in his place, one or two reactions was likely: the soldier would either become ill with battle exhaustion, or he would evade battle by other means, usually desertion. Factors cited as lowering morale and causing desertion or absenteeism were:

1. Psychiatric instability
2. Emotional immaturity
3. Campaign stress – 25% of deserters had been in previous campaigns. Regular soldiers deserted as readily as conscripts.
4. A preponderance of infantrymen – 89% of the total
5. Lack of morale-building factors such as insufficient training, self-confidence, identification with unit, etc.
6. Presence of morale-destroying factors – external strains such as battle stress; internal strain such as separation or change in group; poor leadership; grievances; domestic and personal difficulties. Domestic stress was present in 33% of cases and was a deciding factor.<sup>44</sup>

The need for a good Army Psychiatric Service, to maintain the mental health and morale of soldiers, was foreseen by the Scarborough Committee:

As far as it is possible to foresee the conditions of any future war on a large scale, it seems probable that the circumstances are likely to make even greater demands upon the mental and nervous resources of the personnel of the fighting services than the events of 1914-1918. If this should prove to be the case, appropriate measures designed to admit into the services only those who are possessed of at least an average degree of mental and nervous health and stability will be a factor of prime importance in the successful conduct of the war.<sup>45</sup>

Despite this prescient advice, in 1939 there were only half a dozen Army Medical Officers with psychiatric training.<sup>46</sup> The Directorate of Army Psychiatry, whose brief was to maintain and promote the mental health and efficiency of the Army by every possible

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 249

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, pp. 123-4

<sup>45</sup> The Southborough Committee Report, p. 15

means, was not established until April 1942.<sup>47</sup> It was, in fact, the senior officers of both the “Q” and “A” services, rather than the medical administrative authorities, who first became aware of the importance of the contributions which could be made by Army psychiatry to the understanding of many problems relating to morale.<sup>48</sup> Bad soldiers, disruptive personalities and psychologically unfit men in general were “grit in the military machine from the point of view of morale”.<sup>49</sup> By 1942 there were enough “misfits” already in the Army to cause considerable harm. Between 1942 and 1945, 14% of recruits who passed through the General Service Corps were referred to psychiatrists.<sup>50</sup> The policy of the early weeding out of recruits unfit for service had a marked effect on the number of discharges on the medical grounds for mental disorders between 1943-1945. Discharges of psychopathic personalities fell from 17.18 per 100 of all mental discharges in 1943 to 14.79 per 100 in 1945.<sup>51</sup>

Some commanders continued to believe that dull men made the best soldiers, but what was needed in the Second World War was “initiative, intelligence and military knowledge on the part of every private soldier.”<sup>52</sup> Mental dullness was often found to be a frequent cause of military delinquency, particularly absenteeism. The tendency to desert appeared to be greatest among men of relatively low intelligence: some 50% of all deserters were in the

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<sup>46</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 15

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>48</sup> R.H. Ahrenfeldt, ‘United Kingdom – Military Psychiatry’ in *Medical Services in War*, Sir Arthur Salisbury MacNalty & W.F. Mellor (eds.), (London: HMSO, 1968) p. 188

<sup>49</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 14

<sup>50</sup> J.A. Crang, *The British Army and the People’s War 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p. 15

<sup>51</sup> Source: *Medical History of the Second World War. Casualties and Medical Statistics*. W. Franklin Mellor (ed.), (London: HMSO, 1972) p. 439

<sup>52</sup> Military Training Pamphlet No. 33, ‘Training in Fieldcraft and Elementary Tactics’ (March 1940), Chapter 2, Section 7, quoted in Crang, *The British Army*, p. 45

lower half of the intelligence rating scale.<sup>53</sup> In the North African campaign, before the introduction of psychiatric screening, the percentage of psychiatric casualties was estimated at between 7% and 30%.<sup>54</sup>

Even in the early years of the Second World War the British authorities continued to officially underestimate the problem. Copp and McAndrew, in their ground-breaking study of soldiers and psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, pointed out that although the official British medical history, based on Consultant Psychiatrist Brigadier G.W.B. James' notes, stressed that the campaign against the Italians in December 1940-March 1941 produced less than 200 acute cases for all services, James' own figures indicated that in 1941 one in every six battle casualties was psychiatric.<sup>55</sup> Despite this, in Tunisia both military commanders and medical administrators in the First Army were strongly opposed to the presence of psychiatrists and flatly refused to accept an adviser at army headquarters.<sup>56</sup> General Sir Ronald Adam noted in 1942 that the older school of medical men disliked psychologists and psychiatrists intensely, "and will do anything to stop their use."<sup>57</sup> The situation in the Eighth Army was slightly better in that a psychiatrist was attached to a mobile general hospital from the second Battle of El Alamein.<sup>58</sup> A three-tier system of treatment was generally followed. At first sufferers were sent to forward psychiatric centres, attached to Casualty Clearing Stations, where they were sedated and allowed to sleep as long as they needed. Sleep was the first line of defence against battle fatigue since "...gross fatigue

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<sup>53</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 79

<sup>54</sup> Holden, *Shell Shock*, p. 99

<sup>55</sup> Copp & McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 49

<sup>57</sup> B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000) p. 164

<sup>58</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 166

alone leads some men to the psychiatrist.”<sup>59</sup> Continuing contact with comrades was encouraged, and a ‘curative’ atmosphere was established, which would lead each soldier under treatment to anticipate an early return to duty.<sup>60</sup> Some 30%-60% of men were returned to their units within a week, especially where a strong esprit de corps existed.<sup>61</sup> There was, however, no way of judging the rate of recidivism. Figures for relapses and on the effectiveness of those returned to their units were elusive.<sup>62</sup> If the patients could not be returned fit to carry on, they were sent back to specially designed military Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centres, which the Eighth Army in the Middle East set up in the summer of 1943. Here the four-week rehabilitation scheme of psychiatric cases was possible within the general framework of an ordinary military Convalescent Depot, provided there was a special psychiatric wing under the supervision of a psychiatrist.<sup>63</sup> Those men who did not respond to treatment were repatriated.

The term “battle exhaustion” came into common military parlance during the campaign in North Africa, when troops were constantly on the move, advancing 30 miles a day.<sup>64</sup> This led many officers to believe that the condition was temporary, that if exhausted men could rest they would recover. To commanders worried about the manpower shortage, temporary exhaustion was far more preferable than irretrievable breakdown. The War Office therefore produced informative, educational films for officers and NCOs on the signs of incipient breakdown, so that sufferers could be taken out of the line before they became a liability to themselves, their unit and the Army in general. Since some officers continued to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 166

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 169

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 166

<sup>62</sup> Copp & McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, p. 153

<sup>63</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 168

believe that “shell-shock” was simple cowardice, the films made a point of stating that sufferers did not have a “yellow streak”.<sup>65</sup>

During the inter-war years, and in the aftermath of the Second World War, the study of soldiers’ morale remained largely the purview of doctors or psychiatrists, particularly those who had themselves worked with the psychiatric services during the conflict, and concentrated on the treatment of sufferers.<sup>66</sup> Lord Moran’s seminal study, *Anatomy of Courage*, was first published in 1945. The semi-official history of *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* appeared in 1958.<sup>67</sup> It was some years before historians took up the challenge. Initially much of the work focused on the experiences of soldiers on the Western Front in the First World War. John Baynes’ ground-breaking work, *Morale*, concentrated on one battalion, The Second Scottish Rifles, and studied various influences on their morale.<sup>68</sup> He considered five to be the most important: regimental loyalty; excellent officer-other rank relationships; strong discipline; the sense of duty of all ranks and, finally, sound administration. His concerns perhaps reflected the fact that he was himself a Regular Army officer. They can be regarded as the traditional approach to morale. Most applied equally to the Italian campaign. The only exception was regimental loyalty, due to the reinforcement situation in Italy, which will be examined in detail in Chapter III.

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<sup>64</sup> Holden, *Shell Shock*, p. 99

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 99

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, S.A. McKeith, “Lasting Lessons of Overseas Military Psychiatry”, *The Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. XCII, July 1946, pp. 542-50; and J.D.W. Pearce, “Clinical Aspects of Psychiatric Problems in the Army”, *The Practitioner*, Vol. 154, January 1945, pp 33-38

<sup>67</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*

<sup>68</sup> J. Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage: The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle* (London: Cassell, 1967)

In the 1970s military historians, in common with colleagues in other specialisms, turned their attention to the 'history of everyman'. Reflecting the view of the Nineteenth Century French soldier and military theorist, Ardant du Picq when he wrote, "The man is the first weapon of battle. Let us study the soldier, for it is he who brings reality to it", soldiering in general, and the experiences of fighting men, has been subjected to considerable attention.<sup>69</sup> Even as the Second World War was ending attention was being drawn to the requirements, particularly in terms of the maintenance of morale, of a conscript army.<sup>70</sup> Thirty-one years later, Keegan's *The Face of Battle*, first published in 1976, studied the battles of Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme.<sup>71</sup> Keegan argued that the inclusion of the experiences of ordinary soldiers in the history of war was "the first and most important step in understanding battle 'as it actually was'".<sup>72</sup> *The Face of Battle* was heralded as "a military history from the battlefield, a look at the direct experience of individuals at 'the point of maximum danger'," and the Somme section included a chapter on "The Will To Combat", touching on the reasons why men did or did not fight. This was followed nine years later by Richard Holmes' examination of front line soldiering, *Firing Line*.<sup>73</sup> The reaction of soldiers in various campaigns of the Second World War was highlighted in James Lucas' *The British Soldier* and Paul Addison and Angus Calder's *Time to Kill*.<sup>74</sup> The Second World War British Army was considered in detail in David French's *Raising Churchill's Army* and Jeremy Crang's *The British Army and the People's War*.<sup>75</sup> Face-to-face killing

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in R. Holmes, *Firing Line* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985) p. 18

<sup>70</sup> T. Harrison, "The British Soldier: Changing Attitudes and Ideas", *The British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. XXXV, 1944-45, p. 36 pp. 34-39

<sup>71</sup> J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>73</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*

<sup>74</sup> J. Lucas, *The British Soldier* (London: Arms & Armour Press, 1989); P. Addison & A. Calder (eds), *Time To Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997)

<sup>75</sup> French, *Raising Churchill's Army: the British Army and the War Against Germany, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Crang, *The British Army and the People's War 1939-1945*

in Twentieth Century warfare was investigated immediately after the war in S.L.A. Marshall's study, *Men Against Fire*, which suggested that in the Second World War, among American soldiers at any rate, even in the most aggressive infantry companies, the number of men engaged with any and all weapons rarely rose above 25% and that the men who actually shot to kill were a mere two per cent.<sup>76</sup> There have been academic dissenters to Marshall's finding: Roger Spiller, for instance, pointed out that Marshall's ratio of fire could not be proved.<sup>77</sup> More than 50 years after Marshall published his findings, Professor Bourke's *An Intimate History of Killing* aimed "to put killing back into military history."<sup>78</sup> She contended that for many men and women, killing "was what made 'a lovely war'".<sup>79</sup> However, research carried out by other Allied forces at the end of the Second World War appears to have backed Marshall's figures. In *The Truth About Killing*, both Lt.-Col. Dave Grossman, Professor of Military Science at Arkansas State University, and author of *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, and Vietnam veteran and Professor of Psychology Richard Gabriel, agreed that Marshall's conclusions were probably correct.<sup>80</sup> Grossman commented that "the truth is that at the end of the Second World War the findings were not controversial. Military leaders knew it was true. The average boy out on the front line looking over his sights at another human being was not able or willing to kill the poor schmuck in front of him ..."<sup>81</sup> This had obvious implications for morale in its more traditional definition of fighting spirit: men might be

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<sup>76</sup> Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*

<sup>77</sup> R.J. Spiller, "S.L.A. Marshal and the Ratio of Fire", *Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, Winter 1988, pp.63-71

<sup>78</sup> J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 2

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 375

<sup>80</sup> See: D. Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1995) and R. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1988)

<sup>81</sup> Views express in the television documentary, *The Truth About Killing*, Part 1, screened on BBC2 in 2004.



willing and able to withstand the rigours of battle and remain in the front line, but were not willing and able to kill the enemy at close quarters. Conversely, others might be willing to kill, but were unwilling to submit to the demands of army discipline.

Given that morale is associated with so many aspects of a soldier's experience, both on and off the battlefield, it is not surprising that it has developed a wide-ranging historiography. Timothy Bowman widened the debate with the regard to raising morale in the First World War when he looked to the Irish regiments. Building on the work of Baynes, and J.G. Fuller's *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*,<sup>82</sup> he highlighted factors such as organized sports; regimental holidays; the work of Army chaplains; concert parties and films, all of which were expanded upon in the Second World War. He also noted that although the regimental system "clearly did help to build morale ... the system did lead to a number of problems during the war", particularly with cross postings.<sup>83</sup> Tony Ashworth sought to understand why men fought and how they performed in combat in the First World War and, more importantly, how they sustained their morale. This study paid particular attention to the informal social relationships among combatants, often termed primary groups, where each man guarded not only his own welfare but also the welfare of the others in the group. Other areas of importance he identified were the regimental tradition, although he pointed out that while this was strong in elite battalions, esprit de corps was almost entirely missing from non-elite units. Secondly, he suggested that men acted bravely in combat to fulfil an aggressively masculine code of behaviour. Thirdly, there was the influence of abstract

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<sup>82</sup> J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990)

<sup>83</sup> T. Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) pp. 10-31

values such as the nation state, the flag, and here Ashworth concluded that identification with the wider society did influence combat behaviour in indirect but positive ways.<sup>84</sup>

In the 1990s the psychiatric aspects of warfare were once again investigated. *Battle Exhaustion* was a seminal work of 1990, a study of soldiers and psychiatrists in the Canadian Army which fought in Italy as well as Normandy.<sup>85</sup> This was followed by *Shell Shock*, a look at the subject across the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and a further wide-ranging study, *A War of Nerves*.<sup>86</sup> These studies of the Second World War and later conflicts presented a far wider gamut of personal insights into the effects of “battle exhaustion” and thus offered a greater understanding of how the perception of this condition, and its treatment, has evolved since the First World War.

The Southborough Committee recognised the officer-other ranks relationship, as “the most important factor in maintaining morale....”<sup>87</sup> Gary Sheffield examined such relationships on the Western Front and concluded that “the ethos of the pre-war officer corps, which stressed the need for the officer to exercise paternal care for his men, was a major factor in the maintenance of wartime morale.”<sup>88</sup> He also noted, however, that good officer-man relations did not necessarily lead to combat-effectiveness. “If officers identified too closely with their men, this could lead to a reluctance to take aggressive action and thus put the group at risk.” The advantages of the officer-man relationship, however, he concluded, in

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<sup>84</sup> T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (Basingstoke, Hants: The Macmillan Press, 1980) p. 204-208

<sup>85</sup> Copp & McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*

<sup>86</sup> Holden, *Shell Shock*; Shephard, *A War of Nerves*

<sup>87</sup> The Southborough Committee Report, p. 33

<sup>88</sup> G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan Press, 2000) p. 178

terms of its morale-sustaining role, greatly outweighed the disadvantages.<sup>89</sup> Discipline was the responsibility of the officer, and another aspect of morale, its relationship with discipline, was considered by Bowman for the Irish Regiments and was also the subject of an article on the British Army in Italy in the First World War. In the latter Gerard Oram highlighted the effects of illness and worsening conditions on the morale of the British troops and argued that these factors had as much impact on discipline as did the military operations. This, in turn, resulted in an increasingly lenient approach to discipline within which capital convictions were avoided.<sup>90</sup> Illness and appalling conditions in Italy were not limited to the First World War and their effects on infantry morale in the Second World War, which were considerable, inform part of this thesis. In his larger study of *Military Executions during World War I*, Oram also posited that, on the Western Front, with the change-over from a volunteer to a conscript army in 1917, and increasing evidence that the consent of British troops could no longer be taken for granted, less use was made of the death penalty. "The relationship between morale and discipline is a complex one and it was continually redefined during the war. The progress of the war itself was probably the most influential factor. The failure of the first three years prompted a new approach."<sup>91</sup> In his overarching chapter on morale, Oram described the change over time from the pre-war top-down paternalist approach to morale which depended heavily on discipline, the use of deterrents, esprit de corps and patriotic fervour, to a bottom-up emphasis on an adequate and regular supply of good food, a good mail service to maintain close ties with home, and home leave. He stated: "Concerns about conditions at home were often the final straw for

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 179

<sup>90</sup> G. Oram, "Pious Perjury: Discipline and Morale in the British Force in Italy, 1917-1918", *War In History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, November 2002

<sup>91</sup> G. Oram, *Military Executions during World War I* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp. 98-99.

soldiers in the trenches, causing some to desert.”<sup>92</sup> These bottom-up morale-boosting initiatives were to prove equally as important in the Second World War, spearheaded by the Welfare Directorate.

More recently historians such as Jeremy Crang, David French, Timothy Harrison Place, S.P. MacKenzie, and Mark Connolly and Walter Miller, et al, have tried to understand how various aspects of soldiers’ morale in the Second World War evolved, and how it influenced their actions.<sup>93</sup> Training and leadership, regarded as paramount in the provision of good morale by the Southborough Committee, have attracted particular attention. The Southborough Committee had recommended that the first three months of training should be seen as probationary, after which “all recruits should be regarded by expert observers and judges, and detailed for branches of the service for which they are physically and temperamentally suited.”<sup>94</sup> Yet the soldiers’ common grouse that the Army deliberately put them into a branch of the service for which they were least suited caused concern in the early stages of the Second World War, as this malplacement not only had “obvious implications for operational efficiency, but also for soldiers’ morale since men often became maladjusted through being employed either above or below their capacity.”<sup>95</sup> It was not until June 1941 that the Directorate of Selection of Personnel was formed, with Selection Boards being set up in every command at home and abroad in January 1942.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 89

<sup>93</sup> See, for instance: Crang, *The British Army and the People’s War 1939-45*; French, *Raising Churchill’s Army*; T. Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army 1940-44* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale*; M. Connolly & W. Miller, “The BEF and the Issue of Surrender on the Western Front in 1940”, *War in History*, Vol. II, Issue 4, November 2004, pp. 424-441 and M. Connolly and W. Miller, “British Courts Martial in North Africa, 1940-43, *20<sup>th</sup> Century British History*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2004, pp. 217-242

<sup>94</sup> The Southborough Committee Report, p. 33.

Scientific officer selection was also instituted. It became obvious in the first years of the Second World War that the quality of officers, junior officers in particular, left much to be desired. Jeremy Crang, who looked at the changes which occurred within the British Army principally from 1940-42, including not only officer selection, but also other rank selection, officer-man relations, welfare and education, has shown that there were complaints from units overseas about the quality of new officer material and, in addition, "the cumulative effects of poor selection were evident in the number of officers who proved unable to shoulder the burdens of leadership."<sup>96</sup> The breakdown rate among officers was so high in 1939-40 that Adam asked for a procedure of officer selection to be set up, based on the German model, which had been in operation since 1926.<sup>97</sup> The "leaderless group project" was devised, which, according to Major Wilfred Bion, who was put in charge of one such selection board, "provided a framework in which selecting officers, including a psychiatrist, could observe a man's capacity for maintaining personal relationships in a situation of strain that tempted him to disregard the interests of his fellows for the sake of his own."<sup>98</sup> David French has suggested that the introduction of these War Office Selection Boards not only improved the quality of new officers but also had a positive impact on the morale of other ranks; an increased number of them were willing to put themselves forward for commissions and both successful and unsuccessful candidates believed they had been treated fairly.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Crang, *The British Army*, p. 9

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 29

<sup>97</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 53

<sup>98</sup> Holden, *Shell Shock*, p. 93

<sup>99</sup> French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, p. 74

Timothy Harrison Place investigated training, and contended that the combat effectiveness of British troops, particularly infantry and armour, proved weak during the Second World War.<sup>100</sup> The British Army's leadership failure to establish a coherent tactical doctrine meant that infantry minor tactics came to be regarded as an alternative to artillery-based tactics "rather than a set of complementary techniques to be applied when the blunt artillery instrument was no longer suitable."<sup>101</sup> The fact that "infantry tactics ultimately advanced little from the standards of 1916 is disgraceful."<sup>102</sup> When it looked at training, the opinion of the Southborough Committee was that it should inculcate the highest possible standard of morale, discipline, esprit de corps, esteem of officers and confidence both individually and collectively; and ensure and maintain mental, physical and moral fitness and technical efficiency. Training should aim both at the automatic obedience of orders, in order to consolidate the sense of collective responsibility and efficiency, and yet, at the same time, should also aim at creating the spirit of individual effort.<sup>103</sup> This in itself was a tall order. At the start of the Second World War the old barrack square drill, started in the days of the musket, remained the recognised basis for teaching initial co-operation, uncritical obedience, self control and confidence in weapons.<sup>104</sup> Many conscripts despised "square bashing" and considered it a waste of time, yet the Army believed that attention to detail at all times might save their lives. The often unwilling and unenthusiastic civilian soldiers forced military leaders to look at training with a fresh eye in order both to inculcate the necessary military ethos and to instil adequate levels of weapons training. A report on the "Lessons of the Tunisian Campaign" pointed out that there were numerous complaints from

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<sup>100</sup> T. Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army, 1940-1944*

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 168

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 170

<sup>103</sup> The Southborough Committee Report, Training Period, p. 150

<sup>104</sup> Harrison, "The British Soldier", p. 36

units as regards the standard of training of reinforcements. "In the case of infantry it was usually lack of training in basic infantry weapons, and in platoon tactical training. Untrained men are a liability to the unit."<sup>105</sup>

By 1943 a new training regime had come into play. Battle drill emphasised "fire and movement" (fundamental to infantry minor tactics), infiltration, camouflage, speed, sub-unit initiative, NCO and individual decision and self-critical co-operation.<sup>106</sup> Whether the latter points were fully taken on board by all conscripts is doubtful: initiative is, after all, inherent and cannot be taught. It was believed that what battle drills did instil was a template for "fire and movement" tactics which any soldier could fall back on "in the absence of any ideas of his own or alternative orders from above."<sup>107</sup> The first Battle School was formed early in 1942. There teaching contained three elements: battle drill, vigorous, practical, physical action by all students and live fire, aimed at conditioning men to the noise and turmoil of war.<sup>108</sup> The tougher the training, it was found, the stronger the group identity and consequently morale. "Hate" training was also attempted, which had a detrimental effect on morale. Plans were made to "condition" students to the sight of blood by visiting slaughterhouses and throwing blood about the training areas during active exercises.<sup>109</sup> It had to be abandoned after the first course, following incidents of fainting and vomiting among the trainees. Instead of spurring the men on, it depressed them. Montgomery, then Army Commander, South-Eastern Command, in a Memorandum on Battle Drill (May 1942) observed that attempts to create an artificial blood-lust or hate

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<sup>105</sup> NA WO 204/7975 Lessons from Operations Including Mediterranean and Tunisian and Sicilian Campaigns: Lessons of the Tunisian Campaign 1942-1943, Section 8. No. 3 Supply and Training of Reinforcements.

<sup>106</sup> Harrison, "The British Soldier", p. 36

<sup>107</sup> Harrison Place, *Military Training*, p. 54

during training was worse than futile since such an attitude was foreign to the British temperament.<sup>110</sup> Harrison Place concentrated on training in the UK between Dunkirk and D-Day, and on the North-West European operations. Italy was, above all, an infantry war, and British infantrymen gained considerable on-the-spot battle experience there willy-nilly. This enabled many of them, from privates upwards, to demonstrate “enterprise and initiative ... which emerged despite, rather than because of, the training system.”<sup>111</sup>

Training was supposed to inculcate discipline, both self-discipline and unquestioning obedience to orders, which was regarded as proof of high morale. Desertion denied both, and it was extremely high in Italy.<sup>112</sup> Army Commanders there believed that without the death penalty for desertion their options to enforce discipline were limited. John Peaty, in his article, “The Desertion Crisis in Italy”, examined the deterrents available to army commanders and concluded that the threat of prison was not effective: the exemplary sentencing of some deserters at Anzio to five rather than three years had no effect on the desertion rate.<sup>113</sup> Exemplary sentencing was not limited to Italy during the Second World War. Mark Connelly and Walter Miller examined its use by British courts martial in North Africa.<sup>114</sup> They also examined another aspect of morale in the Second World War, that of the surrender of the British Expeditionary Force in 1940. They reached a conclusion that

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>109</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 200

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 200

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 175

<sup>112</sup> Anonymous, “The Desertion Crisis in Italy: Some Views from an Eighth Army Infantry Platoon Commander”, *The Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* (RUSI) Journal, Vol. 147, No. 5, October 2002, pp.84-8;

<sup>113</sup> J. Peaty, “The Desertion Crisis in Italy, 1944”, *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 147, No. 3, June 2002, p. 79

<sup>114</sup> M. Connelly & W. Miller, “British Courts Martial in North Africa, 1941-3,



contradicts the accepted belief that the BEF was a demoralised army; surrender was a pragmatic decision taken by soldiers with high morale.<sup>115</sup>

High morale and strong group cohesion are linked, yet, as Omar Bartov demonstrated in his book on the German Army on the Eastern Front, where a high casualty rate undermined group solidarity, something must take its place to motivate fighting men.<sup>116</sup> In the case of the German soldiers it was ideology, but British troops very rarely fought for King and Country. S.P. MacKenzie examined the attempts to inculcate a will to win and deepen the British soldier's faith in the cause for which he was fighting in *Politics and Military Morale*, and concluded that in both World Wars it was the perceived need to win the hearts and minds of the troops when their morale appeared to be in question that gave rise to current-affairs and current citizenship education, but that neither produced any dramatic results.<sup>117</sup>

Other areas of soldiers' physical and mental wellbeing became legitimate subjects of study, both by doctors and historians. Soldiers' relationships with women, who were judged vital to the maintenance of morale, were commented upon as early as 1954 by a psychiatrist, Dr. Pearce, and later by historians Mark Harrison for the Second World War and K. Craig Gibson for the First World War.<sup>118</sup> Studies of malaria and VD, both of which took their toll on the armies in Italy, have also come in for greater attention in recent years.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> M. Connelly & W. Miller, "The BEF and the Issue of Surrender on the Western Front in 1940",

<sup>116</sup> O. Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

<sup>117</sup> MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale*

<sup>118</sup> J.D.W. Pearce, "Problems of Sex in the Service," *The Practitioner*, Vol. 172, April 1954, pp. 436-439; M. Harrison, "Sex and the Citizen Soldier; Health, Morals and Discipline in the British Army during the Second World War in R. Cooter (ed.), et al, *Medicine and Modern Warfare* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999); K. Craig

These works provide the general context for any scholarly study of morale during the Italian campaign. But there is also a large body of work on Italian campaign itself, mostly from the strategic and tactical point of view, or concentrating particularly on the principal battles. One of the first books published on the campaign, immediately after the end of the war, was by the journalist Christopher Buckley, who told his readers that: "The book aims at being a serious military narrative."<sup>120</sup> Morale was not mentioned at all. It was followed in 1951 by Eric Linklater's semi-official account, part of "a popular military history by various authors, in eight volumes" on The Second World War. He pointed out that, in the winter of 1944-45, there was a "worrying decline in the morale of certain units" and offered up the following reasons:

They had suffered too heavily in battle and been too long away from home: domestic trouble, unhappily frequent when a soldier has been serving overseas for more than two years, may find a dark reflection in the battle-area, and a woman's infidelity can weaken a man's fighting-spirit almost as gravely as the discovery that he is short of ammunition.<sup>121</sup>

In *The Battle for Italy*, published in 1967, General Jackson, who himself participated in that operation, concentrated on the strategic and tactical aspects of the campaign. He mentioned morale in passing, and only in general terms. He noted, for instance, that "fighting men's instincts are acute; any idea that their efforts are unlikely to have a decisive effect on the

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Gibson, "Sex and Soldiering in France and Flanders: The British Expeditionary Force along the Western Front, 1914-1919", *The International History Review*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, September 2001, pp.535-579

<sup>119</sup> See, for instance, M. Harrison, "Medicine and The Culture of Command: The Case of Malaria in the British Army during the Two World Wars", *Medical History*, Vol. 40, 1996, pp. 437-452; M. Harrison, "Medicine and The Management of Modern Warfare", *History of Science*, Vol. 34, 1996, pp. 379-410 and M. Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>120</sup> C. Buckley, *Road to Rome* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1945)

<sup>121</sup> E. Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy* (London: HMSO, 1951) p. 418

war soon destroys the willingness to take risks.”<sup>122</sup> He also touched upon the desertion problem in the winter of 1944-45, putting it down to ‘end of war’ psychosis. “As far as the British soldiers were concerned, the death sentence for desertion had been replaced by penal servitude. Most soldiers believed that there would be an amnesty after the war and so it was preferable to desert and survive rather than stand another winter in the mountains, taking part in hopeless attacks on strongly held German positions.”<sup>123</sup> There was thus an acknowledgement of a problem, and two different views as to its genesis, one welfare-based, the other a traditional army viewpoint, but no details. These had to wait until the official war history, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Volume V, Part 1, published in 1984, detailed the problems of training, reinforcements and supplies, all of which influenced morale.<sup>124</sup> This was followed in 1987 by Volume VI, Part II, which enumerated desertion statistics. The latter pointed out that there were just under a million men on the ration strength of the British Central Mediterranean Forces. The desertion/AWOL figure, therefore, at worst, was about 0.1%. This was not bad in overall terms, but as most deserters were from the infantry, it had a profound impact.<sup>125</sup>

The Italian campaign has always attracted conflicting views, and morale garnered a different emphasis and importance from each author. Gregory Blaxland, in *Alexander's Generals*, wrote that the challenge the Italian campaign presented was in the maintenance of morale. At various points throughout the book he identifies periods when morale was

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<sup>122</sup> W.G.F. Jackson, *The Battle for Italy* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1967) p. 255

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 284

<sup>124</sup> Brigadier C.J.C. Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part I, 1<sup>st</sup> April to 4<sup>th</sup> June 1944 (London: HMSO, 1984)

<sup>125</sup> General Sir W. Jackson, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol VI, Victory in the Mediterranean, Part II, June to October 1944 (London: HMSO, 1987) p. 376

high, or low, and gives an indication of the number of deserters.<sup>126</sup> John Strawson, a veteran of the campaign, wished to put *The Italian Campaign* in perspective in his overview.<sup>127</sup> He posed the question: “Was Italy worthwhile?” and concluded that it was. The main thrust of his overview was therefore political and strategic, and rarely touched upon the soldiers’ experience. In his introduction to *Circles of Hell* Eric Morris, an historian, not a military man, stated that: “It tells the story of the front-line soldiers.” Its emphasis, however, was not on soldiers’ morale, but rather on why the campaign was fought in the first place.<sup>128</sup> Apart from some reminiscences from veterans, it did not deal with troop morale. Former artillery officers-turned-historians Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, on the other hand, touched upon many faces of morale in *Tug of War*, including desertions, terrible living and fighting conditions, battle fatigue and methods employed to maintain morale.<sup>129</sup> Biographies of senior commanders in Italy mentioned morale, but were not expansive on the subject.<sup>130</sup> The biography of General Sir Brian Robertson, Alexander’s Administrative Officer, brought up the question of manpower shortages and desertion and detailed Robertson’s actions with regard to the latter pressing problem.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> G. Blaxland, *Alexander’s Generals: The Italian Campaign 1944-45* (London: William Kimber, 1979) p. 221-2

<sup>127</sup> J. Strawson, *The Italian Campaign* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987)

<sup>128</sup> E. Morris, *Circles of Hell: The War in Italy 1943-1945* (London: Random House 1993) p. x

<sup>129</sup> D. Graham & S. Bidwell, *Tug of War: The Battle for Italy: 1943-1945* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986)

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, R. Ryder, *Oliver Leese* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987); N. Hillson, *Alexander of Tunis* (London: W. H. Allen, 1952); W.G.F. Jackson, *Alexander of Tunis as Military Commander* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1971); N. Nicolson, *Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972); J. North (ed.), *The Alexander Memoirs 1940-1945* (London: Cassell, 1962)

<sup>131</sup> D. Williamson, *A Most Diplomatic General: The Life of General Lord Robertson of Oakridge* (London: Brassey’s, 1996) pp. 66-67

Specific battles have attracted serious attention from historians, but again most of them have focused on strategic issues. This is certainly true of accounts of the Sicily campaign.<sup>132</sup> Three in-depth examinations of the Salerno landings mention morale if it impinged in any way on the course of the battle, and all refer to the Salerno Mutiny, the largest mutiny and expression of discontent and low morale in the British Army in the Second World War.<sup>133</sup> But it was left to Saul David to look at the mutiny in detail.<sup>134</sup> He did so from a legal rather than a morale standpoint, viewing the sentencing of the mutineers as a gross injustice. According to David, the Army itself contributed to such a catastrophic failure of morale among men of hitherto spotless disciplinary and fighting reputations by sending them, without their prior knowledge and consent, to battalions other than their own. The whole question of esprit de corps, one of the Army's basic morale-boosting tenets, was put into question at Salerno, and during the Italian campaign as a whole. John Ellis's scathing attack on the Cassino operation was sympathetic to the plight of the PBI (Poor Bloody Infantry) of all the nations involved. He noted that the rate of casualties amongst the rifle companies were around 34%, and praised the fighting troops' endurance:

The Allied fighting troops had been brought to the very extremes of physical and mental suffering. Icy cold, rain, sleet, snow, mud, hunger, numbing fatigue, the crash of shells, severed arteries, exposed innards, exploding brains, and fear, gut-wrenching, bowel-moving fear – these had been the motifs of Cassino. Yet amidst this infernal ambience men had attained epic stature, keeping tight hold of themselves during their long days' dying and rising when bidden to trudge forward into fire up the slopes of yet another godless, barren hillside. And now all they had to look forward to was yet more of the same. Truly had Casino been a hollow victory.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> For detailed accounts of the Sicily Campaign, see: H. Pond, *Sicily* (London: William Kimber, 1962); C. d'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988); C. Whiting, *Slaughter Over Sicily* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992)

<sup>133</sup> D. Hickey & G. Smith, *Operation Avalanche: The Salerno Landings, 1943* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1984); E. Morris, *Salerno: A Military Fiasco* (New York: Stein & Day, 1983); H. Pond, *Salerno* (London: William Kimber, 1961)

<sup>134</sup> S. David, *Mutiny at Salerno: An Injustice Exposed* (London: Brassey's, 1995)

<sup>135</sup> J. Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory: The Battle for Rome, January-June 1944* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984) pp. 469-470

Other works on Cassino, including Fred Majdalany's seminal work, *Cassino: Portrait of A Battle*, are military appreciations of all the nationalities involved, with little or no mention of infantry morale.<sup>136</sup> Alex Bowlby's *Countdown to Cassino*, on the other hand, painted a vivid picture of the winter of 1943 and how the soldiers, and their morale, were influenced by the conditions in which they found themselves.<sup>137</sup> This is hardly unexpected given that the author had fought as an infantryman in the campaign. Anzio, like Cassino, has attracted much attention, but again, historians tend to deal with the political and strategic imperatives of the operation.<sup>138</sup> Carlo D'Este, however, did suggest in *Fatal Decision* that "the most worrisome problem facing the commanders was not their enemy but morale."<sup>139</sup> References to morale were scattered throughout his study. The highs and lows of morale were also charted in Douglas Orgill's *The Gothic Line*, the last major assault of a well-fortified German defensive line in 1944.<sup>140</sup>

The histories of armies, division and battalions tend to gloss over anything which might show their subject in a less than favourable light. Some of them do, however, indicate when, and why, morale was low, and if desertion or battle fatigue became a problem. Richard Doherty, whose history of the Eighth Army was published in 1999, when the full scale of the desertion problem in Italy was well known, dealt with morale in some depth, as well as detailing what was done by army commanders before the Final Offensive to address

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<sup>136</sup> See, for instance: G. Forty, *Battle for Monte Cassino* (Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allan Publishing, 2004); D. Hapgood & D. Richardson, *Monte Cassino* (London: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1984); F. Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle* (London: The Popular Book Club, 1957); E.D. Smith, *The Battles for Cassino* (London: Purnell Book Services, 1975)

<sup>137</sup> A. Bowlby, *Countdown to Cassino: The Battle of Mignano Gap, 1943* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995)

<sup>138</sup> See, for instance: W. Breuer, *Agony at Anzio: The Allies Most Controversial Operation of World War II* (London: Robert Hale, 1989); P. Verney, *Anzio 1944: An Unexpected Fury* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1978); R.J. Zaloga, *Anzio 1944: The beleaguered beachhead* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2005)

<sup>139</sup> C. D'Este, *Fatal Decision: Anzio and the Battle for Rome* (London: Harpur Collins Publishers, 1991) p. 3

the situation. He also included material from veterans, as did Ken Ford in his history of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division, and Peter Hart in his look at the activities of the 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry in Italy.<sup>141</sup> But the most acute sense of what infantrymen felt while they toiled up Italy can be gleaned not from the works of historians but from the compilations of interviews, personal memoirs, diaries and papers of the Italian campaign veterans, both published and unpublished.<sup>142</sup> *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, Fred Majdalany's memoirs of his time at Cassino and Wynford Vaughan-Thomas's account of the Anzio beachhead all underscore the hardships the infantry faced in Italy, and the fluctuating state of their morale.<sup>143</sup>

The literature on morale in the British army in the era of the First and Second World Wars has thus produced an eclectic list of factors that degraded and sustained the morale of front-line soldiers. These include, among other elements, esprit de corps or group cohesion; leadership; training; length of time in the line; continuous noise and exhaustion; casualty rates and the fear of illness; living conditions in and out of the line; sports and

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<sup>140</sup> D. Orgill, *The Gothic Line: The Autumn Campaign in Italy, 1944* (London: Heinemann, 1967)

<sup>141</sup> See, for instance: R. Doherty, *A Noble Crusade: The History of Eighth Army 1941-45* (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 1999); K. Ford, *Battleaxe Division: From Africa to Italy with the 78<sup>th</sup> Division* (Stroud, Gloucs: Sutton Publishing, 1999); P. Hart, *The Heat of Battle: 16<sup>th</sup> Bn. Durham Light Infantry, 1943-45* (Barnsley, Yorkshire: Leo Cooper, 1999); J. Horsfall, *Fling our Banners to the Wind* (Kineton: The Roundwood Press, 1978); C. Northcote Parkinson, *Always A Fusilier* (London: Sampson Low, 1949); C. Ray, *Algiers to Austria: The History of 78 Division 1942-1946* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952)

<sup>142</sup> See, for instance: P. Brutton, *Ensign in Italy: A Platoon Commander's Story* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992); Field Marshal Lord Carver, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the War in Italy 1943-1945* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, in association with the Imperial War Museum, 2001); D. Cole, *Rough Road to Rome: A Foot-Soldier in Sicily and Italy, 1943-44* (London: William Kimber, 1983); N. Craig, *The Broken Plume: A Platoon Commander's Story 1940-45* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1982); W.A. Elliott, *Esprit de Corps: A Scots Guards Officer on Active Service 1943-45* (Wilby, Norwich: Michael Russell (Publishing), paperback edition 1997); B. Harpur, *The Impossible Victory: A personal account of the Battle for the River Po* (New York, Hippocrene Books, 1981); P. Howarth, *'My God, Soldiers': From Alamein to Vienna* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); J.A. Renshaw, *Memoirs of an Army Surgeon* (Edinburgh, William Blackwood & Sons, 1948); R. Trevelyan, *The Fortress: A Diary of Anzio and After* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1985);

<sup>143</sup> A. Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 1999); F. Majdalany, *The Monastery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1946); W. Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio* (London: Pan Books, 1961)

entertainments; food; a good mail service; length of time away from home and domestic stress; and the feeling of being forgotten and unappreciated. The more specific literature on the Italian campaign has touched upon issues relating to morale without examining in any detail how and why it varied across time and place. But there is no sustained analysis of how morale amongst the most vulnerable soldiers in Italy, the infantry, developed across the whole course of the campaign. This thesis will fill that gap.

The starting point for this examination of the infantryman's attitude to his employment as a front-line fighting man are the two pamphlets produced by the War Office on the eve of the Italian campaign, *Comrade in Arms* and *The Soldier's Welfare*. Issued by the Army Council, they set out the British Army's official doctrine on morale in the middle years of the Second World War.

Drawn up just six months after the Morale Committee was instituted, *Comrades in Arms* took the form of three lectures issued to junior officers and officer cadets "to assist them in the handling of their men".<sup>144</sup> The introduction noted that:

Your relationship with your men, and how you understand them and look after them, is just one of the four ways of attaining real efficiency in war – the others being training, discipline, and administration.

All four are completely interdependent, and equally important, and on them the morale and efficiency of a unit depends. If one link is weak, the others lose much of their effectiveness, and morale and efficiency suffer accordingly.<sup>145</sup>

The general approach of the first lecture was the standard paternal pattern, unchanged since before the First World War:

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<sup>144</sup> *Comrades in Arms* (The War Office, September 1942), front page

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2



Between you and many of your men a real friendship is bound to grow, and sometimes there will be a little more than that. There is nothing sloppy or sentimental about such a relationship, nor should it be in any way bad for discipline. If you are a youngster, some of the older men will feel kind of paternal towards you and will want to look after you - and you, in your turn, will feel the same way towards some of your young soldiers. All perfectly natural and human, and excellent for morale.<sup>146</sup>

The first lecture laid out various points which the Army Council regarded as essential to the maintenance of morale. They were:

1. No seeking of popularity or relaxing of discipline
2. You must be efficient
3. Give them a sense of unity
4. Put men's interests first
5. Explain things to them
6. Do things with them. Share unpleasant duties, eat with them when on field training
7. Be their champion. Make sure your men do their fair share and are not imposed on
8. Know their names
9. Make the salute a greeting between comrades
10. Be friendly without being familiar<sup>147</sup>

Advice was also given to the junior officers on their relationship with their NCOs. They were told that the NCO was the man who "should not only see to the carrying out of your orders, but who acts as a kind of interpreter between you and your men. .... If he is good and loyal to you, his value is beyond price." If, on the other hand, he was bad, the officers were told to get rid of him. The worst types were the bullies; the petty tyrant and the double-faced man. "Until you have got good NCOs, you cannot have a good unit."<sup>148</sup>

The second lecture referred to men's mental and emotions needs and enumerated the six reasons why men differ from one another, viz: where they came from; their job; their

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 3

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-7

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, pp. 7-8

temperament; their religion; their upbringing and their politics.<sup>149</sup> The latter, particularly, was an acknowledgement that the army was a civilian army, and the men were often “suspicious and resentful of those in authority.”<sup>150</sup> Junior officers were advised to talk informally to their men when the occasion presented itself, read about the localities from which their men hailed, and employ a general knowledge of psychology, to understand and appreciate their men’s situation. The third lecture dealt with the men’s welfare. “The main object of welfare is to keep the men as happy and contented as possible, so that they may be at all times fighting fit and fit to fight.”<sup>151</sup> This, it was emphasised, was the officer’s job, not the padre’s.

The men’s welfare must always be the direct concern of the regimental officer. Otherwise he does not command them in any real sense, nor will he get to know them, and build up that essential relationship of mutual confidence and respect. The padre and the local welfare officer are available to help him to do the job better, but not to relieve him of it. .... No officer can ever afford to neglect at any time the welfare of his men, whether it is during periods of inactivity or in actual fighting. If he does, the morale and fighting efficiency of his men is certain to suffer.<sup>152</sup>

Attention was drawn specifically to various points regarding the soldier’s welfare. They took on board the question of leave, “the best thing both for morals and morale”; messing, which should always be as good as possible; the necessity of letters and contact with home; interviews about private affairs, which was the most important aspect of welfare, “judging from the letters the Welfare Directorate so often gets,” and one where officers seemed to be failing a little. The officer needed to be able to talk to his men about a variety of subjects,

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 16

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 17

including sex and money. Finally, the officer was advised to keep friends together and group men carefully.<sup>153</sup>

*The Soldier's Welfare* was first issued in 1941 and ran to four editions. The second edition, which came out six months after *Comrades in Arms*, covered much the same ground, but with much greater emphasis on welfare.

The welfare of a civilian army is a vast subject, and it is worse than useless to refuse to face the fact when as has already been pointed out, good welfare is one of the main essentials to sound morale and fighting efficiency.<sup>154</sup>

The two main objects of welfare work in the Army, the pamphlet stated, were:

1. To strengthen the morale of the men by making the fullest possible provision for the need of their spirits, minds and bodies, so that they may at all times be fighting fit, ready to fight, and able and willing to give their best
2. To link officers and men together in a bond of mutual friendship and respect, which will not only stand the hardest tests of war, but will be strengthened by them.<sup>155</sup>

In addition to the welfare points raised in *Comrades in Arms* – leave, messing, mail, interviews about private affairs, including sex and money – *The Soldier's Welfare* included Health; Education; A.B.C.A.; Sport and Games; Entertainment; Relations with Civilians; Relations with Allied and Dominion Troops; Discharge and “After the War”.<sup>156</sup>

The three key questions that this thesis will address are: (a) the extent to which the War Office's doctrine, as expressed in *Comrades in Arms* and *The Soldier's Welfare*, correctly identified and weighed the main factors likely to degrade and sustain morale; (b) the extent to which the prophylactic measures the War Office doctrine recommended could be, and were, pursued in Italy; and (c) their success or failure and the reasons for them. To this end

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-25

<sup>154</sup> *The Soldier's Welfare* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: The War Office, 1943), p. 7

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, Foreword, p. 5

key influences on morale - sickness, casualty rates, manpower and desertion - will be examined in the first four chapters. The Army's reaction in the face of rising desertion and AWOL figures will be considered in Chapter V, and finally, the measures taken by both the Army and at battalion level, by officers and the men themselves, to maintain morale, will be looked at in Chapters VI and VII.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, Contents

## CHAPTER I

### SICKNESS

Sick men cannot fight effectively, and sickness was the biggest drain on manpower during the 22 months of the Italian campaign. It was only for a few weeks during particularly heavy fighting that battle casualty numbers exceeded the number of men sick.

**Table 1.1**  
**Admissions to all Medical Units, B.N.A.F. and C.M.F., 1943-1945<sup>1</sup>**  
**(ratios per 1,000)**

<u>Causes of Admission</u>	<u>1943</u>	<u>1944</u>	<u>1945</u>
Total Admission on account of:			
Sickness:	574.83	512.67	440.98
Battle Injuries:	63.86	89.60	9.81
Other Injuries:	65.06	44.41	53.28

Montgomery noted, just before he left Italy at the end of 1943, that

My total casualties since I landed in Italy ...are:

598 Officers        }  
 9,428 other ranks } up to 15 Dec

It is very interesting to note that since I have landed in Italy ... I have had the following through my hospitals:

Wounded        5,400  
 Sick            32,700

You see the proportion of sick to wounded – nearly 7 times as much. Hence the importance of a good medical service, and of good care of the men by the regimental officers.<sup>2</sup>

“Health” was one of the topics included in *The Soldier’s Welfare*. Officers, the pamphlet stated, had to be “keenly alive” to their responsibilities with regard to their men’s health. One of the best tests of a unit’s efficiency was the size of the sick parade, and while malingers were “always exceptional, save in badly disciplined units”, many men, according

<sup>1</sup> F.A.E. Crew, *The Army Medical Services, Campaigns, Vol. III* (London: HMSO, 1959), extract from Table 34, p. 504

<sup>2</sup> IWM Montgomery Ancillary Collection 18, General Sir Frank Simpson MSS, Montgomery to Simpson, 17 December 1943

to *The Soldier's Welfare*, were reluctant to report sick or were ignorant or careless about the rules of health and sanitation.<sup>3</sup>

The principal ailments suffered by troops in Italy are given below (Table 1.2). The most pressing cause of concern for army commanders at the start of the campaign was the high incidence of malaria. Later in the campaign the increase in the number of VD cases became a major drain on manpower levels.

**Table 1.2**  
**Principal Causes of Admission to all Medical Unites, B.N.A.F and C.M.F., 1943-5<sup>4</sup>**  
(Ratios per 1,000 and percentage of Total Sick)

<u>Causes of Admission</u>	<u>Annual ratio per 1,000</u>			<u>Percent of Sick Admissions</u>		
	<u>1943</u>	<u>1944</u>	<u>1945</u>	<u>1943</u>	<u>1944</u>	<u>1945</u>
Malaria	107.65	73.53	19.49	18.73	14.34	4.42
Alimentary Tract*	106.18	62.25	38.89	18.47	12.14	8.82
Skin & I.A.T. (excl. Scabies)	82.00	69.66	58.88	14.27	13.59	13.35
Infective Hepatitis	49.07	25.08	13.70	8.54	4.89	3.11
Respiratory Tract	36.33	31.24	36.35	6.32	6.09	8.24
Venereal Disease	31.29	49.86	68.81	5.44	9.73	15.60
Dysentery	26.56	11.51	4.39	4.62	2.25	1.00
Scabies	19.54	18.89	56.02	3.56	3.69	12.70
Psychoneurosis (excl. Exhaustion)	8.86	19.78	6.30	1.54	3.86	1.43

\*Alimentary excludes dysentery and was largely due to tonsillitis and pharyngitis

There are three main areas of investigation here which can shed light on morale: the type of illnesses suffered; the response of regimental officers and the Army Medical Services to the situation; and how the soldiers themselves were influenced by illness.

<sup>3</sup> *The Soldier's Welfare*, p. 17

<sup>4</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, Table 34, p. 504

## I

Despite the advice in *The Soldier's Welfare* about health, there are indications that, at the start of the Italian campaign, men suffered the debilitating effects of malaria not only through ignorance, but also through failures of army administration, poor leadership and lack of unit discipline. Malaria was a particularly severe drain on manpower in Sicily and Italy in 1943-44. The whole Sicilian coastal belt where the Eighth Army landed on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1943 was malarious and so was the Catania Plain, where they were concentrated for much of the Sicily campaign.<sup>5</sup> A captured document showed that the dangers of this area were known to the Germans and that this might have influenced their tactics.<sup>6</sup> Eighth Army lost approximately 9,000 battle casualties during the Sicilian campaign as against 11,590 to malaria.<sup>7</sup> Malaria was not a new problem for the Army. Eighth Army was forced to leave 1,000 malaria sufferers behind in North Africa prior to HUSKY, and the first 300 cases in Sicily were North African in origin. It was just new to some of the reinforcements who had been brought in to swell the ranks of the depleted infantry battalions following the North African campaign. It appears that some men did not think that malaria was a problem at El Shatt when they were training there. The 2nd Bn Royal Scots Fusiliers Battalion Routine Orders of June 21<sup>st</sup> 1943 put a stop to this misapprehension. "It has been unofficially stated that the area of the El Shatt camps is non-malaria, this is not so. Full malarial precautions will be taken..."<sup>8</sup> Full malarial precautions included anti-malarial creams, nets and mepacrine, a synthesized quinine, as a prophylactic. At that time the standard Medical Instructions on Anti-malarial Precautions

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<sup>5</sup> NA WO 222/1494, *The Campaign for Sicily*, p. 13

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>7</sup> Taken from the report of the Surgeon, AFHQ, North Africa, on Malaria in the Sicilian Campaign, quoted in Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 53

<sup>8</sup> NA WO 169/10289 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Scots Fusiliers War Diary for June 1943

stated that the Officer Commanding a Unit was responsible for all anti-malaria measures within his unit. He should ensure that two tablets of mepacrine were taken, on a parade, after the evening meal on each Monday and Wednesday. He was also to ensure that each man had a proper container with anti-mosquito cream to be smeared on all exposed parts of the body at four hourly intervals; that each Officer, NCO and man was provided with either a mosquito, sandfly or bush net or mosquito-proof bivouac, and that this equipment was always kept in good repair.<sup>9</sup> Many battalion orders stressed that “all anti-malaria instructions will be strictly adhered to.”<sup>10</sup>

In Sicily the attitude of officers and NCOs was paramount in the battle against malaria and the failure of junior officers, and many senior officers too, to set a good example by taking mepacrine regularly and using mosquito nets must be acknowledged.<sup>11</sup> Montgomery believed that “anti-malaria discipline has not been too good in some units, and officer and men have got slack about taking the precautions laid down.”<sup>12</sup> Despite this, it is possible that the high officer casualty figures in Sicily may have contributed to the incidence of malaria. The Assistant Director of Medical Services of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division pointed out that officer casualties had a powerful influence regarding continuity of control of anti-malarial measures.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> NA WO 222/1494 *The Campaign in Sicily* (Medical) p. 23

<sup>10</sup> For example see NA WO 169/10204 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry War Diary for July 1943 Operation Order No. 1, 5 July

<sup>11</sup> NA WO 222/159 Malaria Control in Mobile Warfare: Italian campaign 1943-1945 Thompson, Malaria Control, 7

<sup>12</sup> S. Brooks (ed.), *Montgomery and The Eighth Army* (London: The Bodley Head for The Army Records Society, 1991)p. 262

<sup>13</sup> NA WO 177/401 Medical Diary – ADMS 50<sup>th</sup> Division September 1943 Lessons from Sicilian Campaign – “Malaria”, p. 3



But it is too simple to equate a relatively high incidence of malaria with universally poor discipline. There was also a failure in Eighth Army organisation because “some of the Divisions were desert minded and would not listen to advice” about precautions.<sup>14</sup> Equally, many of the reinforcements sent to Sicily from the UK had either never had mepacrine and knew nothing of its significance, or had been irregularly issued with an odd tablet or two.<sup>15</sup> In addition, policy regarding malaria control was not uniform across the Army. Troops arriving from the Middle East were taking two tablets of mepacrine on Mondays and Wednesday and those from Tunisia were taking one tablet on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.<sup>16</sup> Eighth Army divisions from the Middle East were inclined to scorn mepacrine, and one division even failed to draw its supplies, so that AFHQ had to insist that the tablets be accepted.<sup>17</sup> A lot of mepacrine tablets were lost when the troops waded ashore on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1943 because they had not been packed in waterproof containers.<sup>18</sup> Because of this a suitable container was introduced before the start of the malarial season in Italy the following year.<sup>19</sup> But apart from some slackness in mepacrine administration, there were other reasons for the outbreak of malaria: the failure of malaria control units to arrive early; and a lack of appreciation by the troops of the importance of personal protection methods such as repellents, veils and suitable clothing after sundown. Even so, 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade (50th Division), which lost its bush nets and had none for the first two or three weeks in Sicily, showed the lowest incidence as a Brigade. “It is difficult to ascertain if that, because of the lack of nets, the anti-malarial creams, long

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<sup>14</sup> NA WO 204/1580 Allied Forces Headquarters, Office of the Surgeon: Malaria in the Sicilian Campaign 9 Jul-10 Sep 1943, Part I – Report, p. 1

<sup>15</sup> NA WO 177/410 Medical Diary - ADMS 50<sup>th</sup> Division September 1943 Lessons from Sicilian Campaign – “Malaria”, Item II (d), 30 September

<sup>16</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 71

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 47

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

sleeves and trousers in the evenings were given more attention in this Brigade,” although it was also pointed out that this Brigade “was not quite so much engaged in forward battle positions as the other Brigades both before, and after its arrival in Sicily (D+5).”<sup>20</sup>

There was undoubtedly a disinclination among some soldiers to take proper precautions, though this was probably down to plain ignorance. Some men did not realise what malaria could do to them and did not really care if they caught it: they thought it would be better than ‘catching a burst from a Spandau’ and might keep them out of the firing line for a few days.<sup>21</sup> Others would sell the tablets to gullible Sicilian girls as “anti-baby pills.”<sup>22</sup> But the principal bar to ensuring that proper prophylactic practices were followed, Sir Ronald Adam, the Adjutant-General, believed, was that no one believed that malaria really still existed in Europe.<sup>23</sup> Mepacrine was the only anti-malarial measure which could be carried out under all and every circumstances, even in the firing line.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately it turned the skin and whites of the eyes yellow, and the outbreak of gastro-intestinal disturbances which coincided with the initiation of mepacrine suppressive treatment made it very unpopular during the first part of the campaign.<sup>25</sup> There were also rumours that mepacrine caused impotency, a fear emphasised in German propaganda.<sup>26</sup> Even troops who wanted to maintain anti-malarial discipline had difficulties. “Troops in isolated fighting positions and in small detachments have not been clear as to the day of the week and, under the stress of

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<sup>19</sup> NA WO 222/144 Medical Research Council, Malaria Committee, Sub Committee on Prophylaxis in Combat Areas, 1944

<sup>20</sup> NA WO 177/401 Medical Diary – ADMS 50<sup>th</sup> Division August 1943 Sitrep, 23 August

<sup>21</sup> E. Taylor, *Front-Line Nurse: British Nurses in World War II* (London: Robert Hale, 1997) p. 76

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> LHCMA Adam Papers 3.13, Sickness

<sup>24</sup> NA WO 222/144 Medical Research Council, Malaria Committee, Sub-Committee on Prophylaxis in Combat Areas.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, Combat Area Prophylaxis.

<sup>26</sup> LHCMA Adam Papers 3.13, Sickness

battle and work have, in a small proportion of cases, omitted to stick to regular doses or days. One tablet each night (except Sunday) would be easier to understand and could result in better spread out control.”<sup>27</sup> This suggestion was adopted, probably more for ease of use than in the belief that an increased dosage would be more efficient in reducing the incidence of the illness, and then a three-day course of quinine for the worst affected battalions was prescribed at the end of August 1943, although the incidence of malaria had peaked by mid-August. Mepacrine was a temporary expedient and not a true preventative measure.<sup>28</sup> Nor was it totally effective.<sup>29</sup> In the 78<sup>th</sup> Division 95% of malaria sufferers stated that they had observed full anti-malarial precautions, yet they still went down with the illness.<sup>30</sup>

Other precautions were urged as well. Lt.-Col Wilson’s Battalion Orders (1<sup>st</sup> Bn London Scottish) of August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1943 gave precise instructions how to use head veils, bush nets and mosquito proofed shelters. “The smallest tear,” he finished, “must be closed by stitching.”<sup>31</sup> This was undoubtedly good advice, but not every soldier in Sicily was in a position to profit from it. Lt.-Col Peter Pettit recorded in his diary on August 28<sup>th</sup>: “Big drive on anti-mosquito precautions but no nets available for issue as replacements or for mending the old one. What an army.”<sup>32</sup> Nor was the mosquito cream without problems: it was mooted that it could be a contributory factor in the rising incidence of impetigo.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> NA WO 177/410 Medical Diary - ADMS 50<sup>th</sup> Division September 1943 Lessons from Sicilian Campaign – “Malaria”, 30 September, p. 4

<sup>28</sup> Crew, *Army Medical Services*, p. 54

<sup>29</sup> Imperial War Museum (hereinafter IWM) 94/8/1 I.B. MacKay, “Fighting Fit. The Story of a Regimental Medical Officer in World War II”

<sup>30</sup> NA WO 177/420 Medical Diary – ADMS 78<sup>th</sup> Division August 1943

<sup>31</sup> NA WO 169/10256 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for August 1943

<sup>32</sup> IWM 62/89/1 Lt.-Col. Peter Pettit Diary, 28 August, 1943

<sup>33</sup> NA WO 177/401 Medical Diary - ADMS 50<sup>th</sup> Division September 1943 Monthly Hygiene Reports, Appendix J, Item 7, 10 September

After their experience with malaria in Sicily, both the 5<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Divisions maintained higher malarial precautions, with mepacrine being taken until November 15<sup>th</sup> 1943. The high 5<sup>th</sup> Division sickness figures, following the landings on the toe of Italy, included the very large number of men who contracted malaria in the advance from Reggio to Foggia, or who suffered relapses from Sicily, where the Division had been heavily infected.<sup>34</sup> Malaria was also a problem at Salerno for X Corps. Some Salerno veterans remember that the mosquitoes were worse than the Germans.<sup>35</sup> The mosquitoes at Salerno, “were no ordinary mosquitoes ..... In clouds of thousands they were active not only by night but in broad sunlight too. And they bit through every form of protective clothing that anyone could devise.”<sup>36</sup> They also ate the cream.<sup>37</sup> Nets and cream were therefore useless. 56<sup>th</sup> Division had 38 confirmed cases of malaria on September 18<sup>th</sup>, a figure which rose to 131 a week later. The 46<sup>th</sup> Division had considerably fewer cases of malaria – only 13 – in September, but that figure was to rise steeply in the following months.

After its disastrous brush with malaria in Sicily in 1943, the British Army was taking no chances at the start of the new malarial season. General Routine Orders by General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander, CMF, at the end of March 1944, devoted considerable space to the question of malaria.

1. Malaria is one of the most important health problems in the Mediterranean theatre of war. During the 1943 malaria season the disease seriously reduced the efficiency of all units that failed to take adequate anti-malaria precautions. Owing to the slackness on the part of officers and men alike, the Sicilian campaign was gravely handicapped by a high rate of malaria casualties. It is

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<sup>34</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 523

<sup>35</sup> C. Whiting & E. Taylor, *Fighting Tykes: The Yorkshire Regiments in WWII* (London: Leo Cooper, 1993) p. 23

<sup>36</sup> Morris, *Salerno*, p. 173

<sup>37</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 101.

estimated that this rate rose to ten times the figure that would have occurred had orders been obeyed.

2. Commanding officers are reminded that they are responsible for the health of their men and that they will incur a grave responsibility should they neglect to enforce orders on the subject of malaria. Their responsibilities extend to areas outside their lines where conditions exist which may prove injurious to the health of their men. Where the remedying of these conditions is beyond the resources of the unit a full report will be made to area or divisional headquarters.

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3(f). For suppressive treatment of malaria, mepacrine will be issued, with the rations, on the scale of seven (0.7gm) tablets per man per week during the period 1<sup>st</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> November.

A very small proportion of officers and men may prove intolerant to the drug. In such cases the medical officer with concurrence of the Officer Commanding will record the fact on AB 439 or AB 64 and such an officer or man will not take mepacrine. Certificates of intolerance will not be given until every attempt has been made to accustom the subject to the drug.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, a concerted drive towards the eradication of the mosquito breeding grounds was implemented. The first batches of DDT (dichlor-diphenyl-trichlorethane) arrived in Italy.<sup>39</sup> Experiments with DDT as a residual spray in buildings demonstrated that, using 5% DDT in kerosene, rooms would remain mosquito-free for about two months. "This method offered, for the first time in military history, the possibility of really effective malaria control in forward areas."<sup>40</sup> Malaria Control Units were responsible for the spraying, but "on the whole the conditions under which these units had been formed had made them the repository of the misfits and throw-outs of every arm of the Service."<sup>41</sup> This seems to have had a deleterious effect on the spraying programme until at least July 1944. Nor was it always possible to spray in the front line. At Cassino, for instance, conditions

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<sup>38</sup> NA WO 170/2 G1 (Br) AFHQ April-June 1944 General Routine Orders by General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, 31 March 1944

<sup>39</sup> NA WO 222/159 Malaria Control in Mobile Warfare: Italian Campaign 1943-45, p. 9

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

were perfect for the breeding of mosquitoes. "The stagnant pools which had formed within the craters after the bombing and the torrential rain... was hell for humans... it was heaven for mosquitoes, bullfrogs and fireflies at night and every kind of fly by day."<sup>42</sup> Front-line troops were particularly vulnerable to mosquito and fly-borne illnesses: it was difficult to take precautions when lying immobile in a trench or sanger. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, with 4<sup>th</sup> Division, recorded, on April 21<sup>st</sup> 1944 "a further 13 cases, believed malaria, in B Coy area, since 15 April, and a number of cases, approx. 12, from other Coys as well. Present camp area will be a very bad one shortly, and MO is taking vigorous steps, with Coy anti-malaria squads, to eliminate breeding grounds."<sup>43</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Division had 86 fresh cases and 93 relapses in April.<sup>44</sup>

The battalion anti-malarial squad was made up of an NCO and two men under the supervision of the Unit MO. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Royal West Kents' squad was responsible for the daily inspection of mosquito nets and their proper use, spraying all tents, bivouacs and buildings with 'Flysol' each morning and evening and reporting any breaches of individual anti-malarial precautions.<sup>45</sup> The 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshires recorded that when the malarial season commenced all anti-malarial precautions were taken: mosquito nets and creams, and insect repellents were issued and a Battalion Advisory Committee was set up to assume responsibility for the co-ordination of anti-malarial measures.<sup>46</sup> Malaria discipline was insisted upon by all commanders, backed by less than subtle warnings. On battalion noted that "only by strict control will the menace of malaria be defeated. Other factors being

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>42</sup> Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, p. 32

<sup>43</sup> NA WO 170/1379 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry War Diary for April 1944

<sup>44</sup> NA WO 177/378 Medical Diary - ADMS 4<sup>th</sup> Division April 1944

<sup>45</sup> NA WO 170/1419 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for May 1944

equal, the incidences of malaria in respective coys will be taken as an index of the zeal with which these measures are carried out.”<sup>47</sup>

These measures produced some positive results. Malaria admission to hospital, which had accounted for 18.73% in 1943, dropped to 14.34% in 1944, but still accounted for 73 in 1,000 hospital admissions.<sup>48</sup> Thus it remained a massive drain on manpower. It is possible the official figures underestimated the problem, since uncertain cases were generally classified as ‘Not Yet Diagnosed’ (NYD) fever, rather than malaria. In 56<sup>th</sup> Division, there were 370 cases of NYD – four officers and 366 ORs - during the last three months of 1943. The difficulty in diagnosis at a time when there were insufficient microscopes to keep up with the demands for accurate blood tests is suggested by the fact that on December 16<sup>th</sup>, when 56<sup>th</sup> Division was preparing for a 14-day rest period, the ADMS suggested that MOs should find out from Company Commanders which NYD men should be seen by a psychiatrist.<sup>49</sup> Once diagnosed, only the mildest cases of malaria could be treated in forward areas. Treatment of the more severe cases, at the Casualty Clearing Station or at base, lasted more than three weeks.<sup>50</sup> At the start of 1945 the medical authorities and army chiefs were keen to ensure that all the good work put in in 1944 to reduce manpower losses from malaria was maintained. It was known that the Lombardy and Ravenna Plains, and the Po Valley, which still lay ahead of the Allies, were highly malarious, but with operations at a standstill from January they had an opportunity to make plans for forward spraying of DDT and Paris green [a vivid green toxic crystalline salt of copper and arsenic,

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<sup>46</sup> NA WO 170/1399 2/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for May 1944

<sup>47</sup> NA WO 170/1419 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for May 1944

<sup>48</sup> Figures, respectively, from Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 504, Table 34 and NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 8

<sup>49</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary - ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division December 1943

used as an insecticide] by aircraft, and for training the spraying teams. A storage and loading depot was established on the airfield at Rimini and spraying started on March 18<sup>th</sup>, working first along the main routes in the worst areas, with the aim of destroying as many hibernating mosquitoes as possible.<sup>51</sup> Eighth Army's principal attack in the Spring Offensive was launched on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1945 and in 23 days the campaign in Italy had ended. The speed of the advance made it impossible for the spraying teams to keep pace with the forward troops, which is reflected in the rise in the figures for the second quarter of 1945.

**Figure 1.3**

**Eighth Army Malaria Statistics, 1943-1945<sup>52</sup>**

<b><u>Primary Malaria</u></b>		
1943	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	12,532
1943	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter	4,178
1944	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	901
1944	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	3,037
1944	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	3,288
1944	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter	927
1945	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	365
1945	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	650

It is clear from the figures in Table 1.3, however, that the measures against malaria put in place in 1944, and continued in 1945, did produce a considerable saving of manpower. At battalion level MOs lectured troops on the dangers of malaria in the forthcoming operations in the Po Valley.<sup>53</sup> Every effort was made to ensure that each man followed personal malaria precautions, including a more humorous approach than usual in the Royal West Kent's battalion newspaper, *The Invicta News*, entitled "What Will Your Wife Think?"<sup>54</sup> (See next page).

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<sup>50</sup> Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 138

<sup>51</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 589

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 590

<sup>53</sup> NA WO 170/5045 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for April 1945

<sup>54</sup> NA WO 170/5022 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for April 1945 *Invicta News*



WHAT WILL YOUR WIFE THINK — — ?



INVICTA ANTI-MALARIA BULLETIN No. 1.

In Sicily we had 5,000 more Malaria casualties than battle casualties.

Malaria can destroy an Army - it very nearly did destroy an Army (OUR Army) two years ago.

As far as YOU are concerned, Malaria can ruin your health permanently and turn you into a chronic chattering invalid. What will your wife or girl friend think if you got home in that condition.???

Yet Malaria is a disease which can be avoided if certain precautions are taken.

Your Coy Health Officer will tell you what to do and what NOT to do.

DO WHAT YOU ARE TOLD - FIGHT MALARIA - PRODUCE A GENERATION TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD.

ZERO HOUR IS REVEILLE TO-MORROW 1st MAY 45.

**GOOD LUCK and  
GOOD BUG HUNTING!**  
30 APRIL 1945.

## II

As the campaign advanced it was VD which became more worrying in terms of manpower loss. "In December 1943, nearly 4,000 cases were admitted to hospital with VD. The average time spent in hospital was twenty days, and therefore in this case equivalent to the loss of four infantry battalions for three weeks. In Italy the rate of sickness from VD is greater than the battle casualty rate ..."<sup>55</sup> There are no statistics for Italy showing what percentage of the total of sufferers were front-line troops, but at the beginning of 1943 a working party set up to investigate the incidence of VD in North Africa showed that lack of opportunity was the single most effective bar to catching VD, in that the lowest incidence was among forward troops and the highest among soldiers at the base.<sup>56</sup>

The first cases in Italy seem to have been contracted among men of 5<sup>th</sup> Division in Francavilla, when 161 cases were reported in the week ending October 9<sup>th</sup> 1943. Then, when V Corps troops passes through Taranto and Bari, the weekly figure reached its peak of 226 cases on October 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>57</sup> The main locations of infection in 1943 and early 1944 were Naples, Salerno, Bari and Campobasso. The first three were leave centres and the last a transit and staging area.<sup>58</sup> Rome and then Florence became the main sources of infection as the armies moved north. Most cases of VD could be traced back to leave in a major town. During January-March 1945, VD was the largest cause of sick wastage in the Allied Armies. The X Corps DDMS reported that it was only when X Corps rest centre, located in one of the main streets of Rome, closed that the number of cases in that formation started to decrease. Eighth Army rest centre, which was located very much further out of Rome,

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<sup>55</sup> DMS AFHQ Health Notes, quoted in Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 536

<sup>56</sup> Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, pp. 146-7

<sup>57</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 533

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 537

did not produce cases to the same degree.<sup>59</sup> VD accounted for 50 in 1,000 hospital admissions in 1944.<sup>60</sup> There was a steady rise in the incidence of cases in the last four months of the year, most infected while on leave, notably in Rome. The average number of notifications weekly for the whole of Eighth Army was:

**Table 1.4**  
**Average Weekly notifications of VD cases in Eighth Army, Sept-Dec 1944<sup>61</sup>**

<u>Month</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>
September (5 weeks)	190
October (4 weeks)	245
November (4 weeks)	281
December (5 weeks)	303

Among a sampling of British divisions, the figures were:

**Table 1.5**  
**Average Weekly Notifications of VD cases per Division, Sept-Dec 1944**

<u>Formation:</u>	<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>November</u>	<u>December</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Division:	-	66	54	68 <sup>62</sup>
4 <sup>th</sup> Division:	85	48	20	- <sup>63</sup>
56 <sup>th</sup> Division:	19	25	126	76 <sup>64</sup>

From the autumn of 1944 the rise in the incidence of VD coincided with the policy of giving troops more time away from the front line. Figures for Italy, per thousand per annum, from October to February, were:

**Figure 1.6**  
**Incidence of VD in the Italy Campaign<sup>65</sup>**  
**(Ratio per thousand per annum)**

October 44:	43.18
November 44:	54.85
December 44:	53.01
January 45:	61.87
February 45:	(about) 64

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 541

<sup>60</sup> NA CAB 101/224 "The British Soldier in Italy", p. 8

<sup>61</sup> NA WO 222/1495 *The Campaign in Italy, 1943-1945, Medical*, p. 148

<sup>62</sup> NA WO 177/375 Medical Diaries - ADMS 1<sup>st</sup> Division October-December 1944

<sup>63</sup> NA WO 177/394 Medical Diaries - ADMS 4<sup>th</sup> Division October-November 1944

<sup>64</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diaries - ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division September-December 1944

<sup>65</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945, p. 7

The British Army's attitude to VD in general was that it should not be contracted in the first place and should be regarded as if it were a self-inflicted wound. "It should clearly be understood by every man that it is a disgraceful act to endanger his health while on active service by consorting with a loose woman."<sup>66</sup> The moral dimension involved in all discussions of sexually transmitted diseases was very evident in some of the Army recommendations, and their authors appear to have conflated moral and morale. The Consultant Venereologist to the MEF, Brigadier R. Lees, recommended that: "A high code of personal morality must be followed and all must be taught that complete abstinence from sexual intercourse is not detrimental to health or vigour. Association with public prostitutes is 'conduct unbecoming an Officer and a Gentleman'."<sup>67</sup> This was an attitude reflected in the UK. At a meeting on VD staged in London in 1943 by the Central Council for Health Education the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. W. Temple, spoke out against the distribution of prophylactics to troops on the grounds that it would be an inducement to fornication. He insisted that Army education should stress the sacredness of sex and the possibility of chastity.<sup>68</sup> Such exhortations might have satisfied the moral code of the person making the recommendations, but did little to stem the seemingly inexorable rise of cases, and had little to do with maintaining morale. Indeed, one soldier remembered that Montgomery, who was "quite a moralist . . . realized that the morale of his men must be kept as high as possible. Consequently the issue of contraceptives to every soldier going on leave was as important as a tin of bully beef."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Recommendations for the prevention of VD in CMF, December 1943, quoted in Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 534

<sup>67</sup> NA WO 204/6725 Recommendations for the Prevention of VD Amongst Allied Forces in the Central Mediterranean Theatre of War

<sup>68</sup> M. Harrison, *Medicine and Modern Warfare*, pp.225-250.

<sup>69</sup> IWM 88/48/1 D.O. Helm, p. 67

In October 1943, the army medical authorities had noted that since the landing in Italy the incidence of VD had risen and was still rising, despite the measures which had so far been taken to prevent it. It would become an even more serious problem as more large towns were occupied unless a comprehensive policy was adopted. Three points were raised for consideration by the DDMS:

- (a) Rapid development of welfare and Social amenities, Restaurants, Clubs, Cinemas. Organised Games, Boxing, Education, etc. is of first importance. The R.A.Ch.D., [army chaplains] Welfare, NAAFI, YMCA, Church Army, should work together to get the best results. Delivery of mail from home should be expedited.
- (b) Reconsideration of the Brothel policy. It is considered that it is better to allow certain controlled houses which have to conform to high hygienic standards, than to close them all, leaving uncontrolled Brothels and Clandestine prostitution as the only alternative.
- (c) Effective action to be taken against clandestine prostitutes whatever Brothel policy may be. The legal aspects should be clearly defined and sufficient Military and Civil Police must be made available to enforce the regulations.<sup>70</sup>

The reaction of the Allied Forces Headquarters to the recommendations was to emphasize (a) and (c) and ignore (b). Officers were urged to organise entertainment and sport to occupy their soldiers' off-duty hours. It was recommended that The Women's Auxiliary Services were to be employed in all base areas, "as the presence of women from the home countries, with their high standards of conduct, undoubtedly raises the standard of conduct of the troops." All brothels were to be placed out of bounds by the local military authority, and the civil authorities were to suppress clandestine prostitution.<sup>71</sup> By February 1944 there were 3,200 cases of VD under treatment in British hospitals in the CMF, the equivalent of one brigade permanently out of action. The contributory factors were seen as:

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<sup>70</sup> NA WO 204/6725 VD: Measures for Control: Aspects of Disciplinary Action. Letter from DDMS to AFHQ, Adv. Admin. Ech., CMF, 25 October 1943

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Letter from the Chief Administrative Office, Allied Forces Headquarters, 19 January 1944

2(a) Female

- (i) Poverty and starvation leading to prostitution
- (ii) High percentage of infected women

2(b) Male

- (i) Reaction after battle
- (ii) Lack of precaution after intercourse
- (iii) Failure to realise seriousness of avoidable sickness
- (iv) Lack of leadership. Unit and Sub unit control and self discipline.<sup>72</sup>

A lack of fighting spirit was not cited as a contributory factor, but two undoubted causes were omitted: boredom and the strain of a long separation from home. According to Fred Majdalany, the first thing soldiers wanted to do when they got out of the line was have a good sleep, then get cleaned up, put on some new clothes and get into a town. "It didn't matter which town. Any town would do. Where there were streets to walk in and shops and cafés and women. Above all they wanted women. They didn't necessarily want to sleep with women. They just wanted to be in places where there *were* women."<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately a fair percentage of the women the men were likely to meet in leave towns were infected with venereal disease. Italian women sold themselves for food - prostitution was the result of semi-starvation among the civilian population. The Bureau of Psychological Warfare stated in an April 1944 bulletin that 42,000 women in Naples, out of a nubile female population of 150,000, were engaged either on a regular or occasional basis in prostitution.<sup>74</sup> The Military and Civil Police in Naples tried to deal with the problem: in the four months up to May 11<sup>th</sup> 1944 they arrested 345 pimps and 4,590 prostitutes.<sup>75</sup> Brothels were closed down in all towns frequented by troops, and clandestine prostitutes and 'pimping' was discouraged as far as possible.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Letter from Brigadier, DA & QMG, Eighth Army, 11 February 1944

<sup>73</sup> Majdalany, *The Monastery*, pp. 94-5

<sup>74</sup> N. Lewis, *Naples '44* (London: Eland, 1983) p. 115

<sup>75</sup> NA WO 204/6725 VD: Measure for Control: Aspects of Disciplinary Action. Provost Marshal's letter, 11 May 1944.

It was recommended that rest centres should to be sited as far from unhygienic areas and leave to towns such as Naples was to be restricted, if not discontinued.<sup>76</sup> The problem with that policy was it could lead to boredom and resentment and was not necessarily effective in its stated aim of keeping men away from temptation. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Iniskillings were in reserve the battalion took billets

in a giant farm sprawling alone amidst miles of rolling grassland. Generally we had nothing to complain about. The accommodation and food were adequate. No shells burst upon our toilet or our meals; and the rituals of training, marching, parading, form-filling and being inspected for this or that, were observed no more than fanatically. But there was one thing wrong with the place. It was stupefyingly dull. In a country of inexhaustible fascination, we were cut off from everything by miles of boring, dispiriting grass. There were no fine buildings, restaurants, shops or avenues where we could elevate our minds, fritter away our lire, improve our Italian or chase the girls – these being activities reserved to relieve the stress of war on staff officers and Base troops. Indeed the only two birds in the vicinity, feathered or unfeathered, of whom I heard, were two prostitutes whom some resourceful platoon conjured out of the grassland and then kept fully occupied for an hour or so.<sup>77</sup>

Everything possible was done to discourage soldiers from associating with prostitutes. Spike Milligan remembered that “if the brochure was telling the truth, venereal disease was walking the streets of Naples and one could contract it just by shaking hands with a priest.”<sup>78</sup> When some KOYLI men were given a three-day leave in Naples they noticed that the roads leading to the city were plastered with signs warning of the perils of VD. “The leavemen were startled to see Military Police cordoning off whole areas of the city in surprise raids, grabbing all women from 16 to 60 and, without explanation, carting them off for blood tests.”<sup>79</sup> This attempt to deal with the problem at source, so to say, was bound to

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<sup>76</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 535

<sup>77</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 106

<sup>78</sup> S. Milligan, *Mussolini: His Part in My Downfall* (London: Michael Joseph, 1978) p. 27

<sup>79</sup> Whiting & Taylor, *Fighting Tykes*, pp. 27-28



JUST  
ANOTHER

# "Claptrap"

YOU CAN  
RUIN YOUR  
FUTURE  
WITH —

## V.D.!





fail when it was possible to use a tin of corned beef “in exchange for the body of any girl of easy virtue”.<sup>80</sup>

The army made great efforts to educate the soldier by religious instruction, film and lectures on the prevention and probable effects of VD. One soldier recalled a VD exhibition at the Palace in Caserta:

Venereal disease was a real problem in Italy – hence the exhibitions - which consisted of two or three rooms displaying coloured and black and white photographs of the results of having intercourse and picking up the disease. They were truly terrifying and if temptation had been put before me I should certainly have thought twice. I feel that these exhibitions must have been a deterrent to any sane and responsible man but there must have been many who were prepared to risk the consequences.<sup>81</sup>

Another remembered that they were

compelled to see a photographic exhibition showing the ravages of venereal disease. They were pretty ghastly photographs, not the sort of thing you want to see immediately before lunch. The infantryman’s view is, “Sod it, I may get killed tomorrow so why not!” But I think it put a lot of the lads off their nooky for quite some time and it made a lot more take precautions – they no longer rode ‘bare back’!” (Corporal Kenneth Lovell, B Coy, 16th DLI).<sup>82</sup>

The education campaign started off with a major article entitled “Big Losses – But Not In Battle” in the *Union Jack*, one of the British Army newspapers, on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1944. “If you get syphilis or gonorrhoea you are not only ruining your health, but you risk bringing suffering and misery to your wife and children later. Is it worth it?” demanded the writer.<sup>83</sup> The answer, to quite a few, given the figures, seems to have been ‘yes’. “They wanted a

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<sup>80</sup> Lee Harvey, *D-Day Dodger*, p. 71

<sup>81</sup> IWM 99/72/1 Captain P. Royle, p. 20

<sup>82</sup> Hart, *Heat of Battle*, p. 159

<sup>83</sup> NA WO 204/6725 VD: Measures for Control: Aspects of Disciplinary Action *The Union Jack*, 26 January 1944

woman if they could – they were all human. They probably hadn't seen a woman for six months, and naturally if they had the chance they would.”<sup>84</sup>

In January 1944 the Deputy Director of Medical Service pointed out that most troops were indifferent to the risk of VD. He cited the fact that during November and December, 353 cases of the disease were reported in one area, a rate of 100 per 1000 per annum. Out of this total of 353, 223 men took no form of preventative treatment, and only 36 men visited a PA (Prophylactic Ablution) Centre.<sup>85</sup> This is not to be wondered at since the PA Centres were unwelcoming and discouraging facilities, as can be seen from Appendix I. Despite this, pragmatic measures were continued. The Colonel ADMS, 56<sup>th</sup> Division, wrote to his medical offices that “Men will be getting leave – see that you have protective sheaths and if possible E.T. [early treatment] packs in the R.A.P. ... Try and get the warning round the unit, how high the V.D. incidence is in Italy and that failure to take adequate precautions is asking for trouble.”<sup>86</sup>

Lack of leadership and discipline was cited as a factor in the rising incidence of VD. According to the pundits, a well-disciplined unit would have a low incidence of VD. “Troops with bad discipline are more prone to expose themselves to V.D. and ignore all advice and precautions.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, according to Brigadier R. Lees, Chief Venereologist, MEF,

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<sup>84</sup> Company Sergeant Major L. Thornton, quoted in Hart, *Heat of Battle*, pp. 158-9

<sup>85</sup> NA WO 204/6725 VD: Measures for Control: Aspects of Disciplinary Action. Letter from DDMS to Adv. Adm. Ech., CMF, 8 January 1944

<sup>86</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division December 1943 Rest Periods, Item 2

<sup>87</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 534

too many officers were tolerant of their men visiting prostitutes, and many considered sex to be essential to morale.<sup>88</sup> The discipline of the Guards was legend, but one remembered:

..... every effort was made to see that men did not spend too long in the line without some sort of relief. This was particularly the case in the winter of 1944/45 when conditions were far from easy.

For some months we ran our own camp in Prato by re-organising the Bn on a three rifle company basis and using the nucleus of the 4<sup>th</sup> company to run the camp. This was quite successful although I fear that the sexual orgies that went on would not have met with the approval of wives and girl friends.

The principal billet in Prato had a resident prostitute and I gathered from what I heard (I did not have first hand experience) that she was available at any hour of the day or night....<sup>89</sup>

Despite the fact that lack of discipline, whether self-discipline or unit discipline, was regarded as the root cause of the problem, the contraction of VD was not, in itself, a disciplinary offence. The offence lay in concealing the fact that the disease had been contracted.<sup>90</sup> It was suggested by some that greater punitive action should be taken against any man who contracted the disease, either through increased financial penalties (the British Army was almost alone in retaining financial penalties as a deterrent) or disciplinary action.<sup>91</sup> The Judge Advocate's Office, however, could not support such measures on the following grounds:

1. In my opinion unless it is made an offence for an officer or soldier to have sexual intercourse with a woman other than his wife it cannot be alleged that an officer or soldier is guilty of conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline if he contracts V.D.
2. Syphilis, I understand, may be contracted without the man having sexual intercourse with a woman. In some cases kissing an infected woman on the mouth or even a less intimate contact may pass on the disease.
3. It may well be that gonorrhoea can only be contracted by sexual intercourse but I think that it is established by medical opinions that no matter

<sup>88</sup> Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 150

<sup>89</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, "Diary of a Guardsman", Vol. 2, p. 239

<sup>90</sup> NA WO 204/6725 VD: Measures for Control: Aspects of Disciplinary Action. Letter from DA & QMG, Eighth Army, 11 February 1944

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, Letter Allied Forces Headquarters G1/B/3174/A3, 15 May 1944

what precautions the man may take he invariably runs the risk of infection as the germ is extremely potent and active.<sup>92</sup>

Increased financial penalties would require War Office approval, and it was doubtful that that would be forthcoming. In addition, past experience had indicated that punishment of soldiers who contracted the disease had not resulted in a reduction in the incidence of the disease, but rather to an increase in concealment, which resulted in a delay in effecting a cure.<sup>93</sup> By the end of 1944, however, the situation was regarded as so serious the concealment of VD became a court martial offence in all cases, charges being preferred under Section 11 of the Army Act (Neglect to Obey Garrison or Other Orders).<sup>94</sup>

The DDMS, Eighth Army, believed that there was one overriding reason for the rising incidence of VD, and that was lack of home leave.

The solution of the V.D. problem in this theatre will not be found in the provision of better P.A. Centres, in propaganda or education, or by suppressing or controlling prostitution.... The only measure likely to produce any substantial lowering of V.D. rate in an expeditionary force is leave to U.K. at reasonable intervals.

The majority of cases of V.D., and the majority of men making use of P.A. Centres, are individuals who have served overseas for two years or more....the newcomer to any formation which has been serving overseas for a considerable length of time observes a subtle peculiarity of psychology which is difficult to define, but which is reflected in the case of officers in a narrowing of intellectual activity and in the type of conversation and humour which finds favour. Amongst others ranks, with their more limited resources for sublimation through social and intellectual interests, the effect of long continued service overseas is seen in an increase in the V.D. rate ...<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, Letter from the Judge Advocate General's Branch, 3 April 1944

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, Aspects of Disciplinary Action Chief Administrative Office, Allied Force Headquarters, Letter, 15 May 1944

<sup>94</sup> NA WO 170/5 G1(Br) AFHQ December 1944 Routine General Orders by Field Marshal The Hon. Sir Harold R.L.G. Alexander, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, 22 December 1944

<sup>95</sup> NA WO 222/1495 "The Campaign in Italy 1945-1945: Medical", p. 149

In only 13 weeks in the whole of 1944, but in 11 out of the first 13 weeks of 1945, was the incidence higher than 1/1,000/week. The opportunities in 1944 were not less. The most significant difference was the fact that another year had been added to the length of service overseas.<sup>96</sup> The rise was a manifestation of the war weariness of men too long in the line and too long away from home.

The manpower losses through VD were finally reduced not by moral exhortations, or attempts to educate, but by medical advances. In October 1944 it was decided to treat with penicillin every case of Gonorrhoea and of Primary and Secondary Syphilis.<sup>97</sup> This cut the average number of days a man spent in hospital from 19.1 days during the quarter April-June 1944 to 3.48 during the quarter October-December.<sup>98</sup> The saving in manpower was considerable, but the success of penicillin itself did nothing to deter the ever-rising number of cases.

### III

Another cause of sick wastage, especially in 1943, was infective hepatitis, or jaundice as it was known.

This illness became epidemic with the troops in North Africa and Italy. It was not very serious in itself as a general rule, although deaths were not unknown, but the total loss of manpower was quite serious because it usually involved the sufferer being in hospital for about three weeks. The cause did not seem to be known but it was believed to be picked up from unwashed fruit. The symptoms were a general feeling of lassitude and an upset stomach which became very tender and painful. It was accompanied by yellowness of the skin, eyes, and urine, hence Yellow Jaundice.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 540

<sup>97</sup> NA WO 177/375 Medical Diary - ADMS 1<sup>st</sup> Division October 1944 Medical Administrative Instructions, 2 October

<sup>98</sup> NA WO 222/1495 "The Campaign in Italy 1943-45: Medical", p. 148

<sup>99</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 135

A total of 3,298 cases were admitted to hospital during September-November 1943, and in December there were 1,435. This disease was dubbed the "Officers' Disease" as the ratio of officers to ORs suffering from it was four to one.<sup>100</sup> In the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshires every officer who landed at Salerno had contracted jaundice by December.<sup>101</sup> This was particularly worrying as "in and out of battle there is no doubt that the Commanding Officer is the focal point of unit morale."<sup>102</sup> However, despite the 6<sup>th</sup> Lincolnshires' experience, it may well be that its occurrence in officers was higher in the rear echelons overall than in the front line. One doctor with 46<sup>th</sup> Division wrote:

It has been suggested that these cases were more common amongst officers, and it was thought that utensils in the Officers [sic] Mess may be a cause of cross infection. However, in an Infantry battalion on Active Service there was rarely an Officer's [sic] Mess set up. All the cases seen by me were from all ranks and from all the different companies.<sup>103</sup>

Other suggestions for the cause of jaundice abounded. One soldiers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Northants, for instance, was told that "a lot of soldiers had it due to the tinned bacon which was so fatty. It came out of the tin wrapped in a kind of greasy paper and you could hardly see the lean for thick fat covering everything."<sup>104</sup>

Although the doctors were asked to look out for particular aetiological factors, no concrete reasons were put forward. Some doctors believed that, due to its infective character and seasonal incidence (September-January) it was a virus, others that it was a bacterial disease spread by flies. It was only in 1944 that scientists in the UK and the USA demonstrated that the jaundice appearing amongst troops was in fact two kinds: one a viral jaundice

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<sup>100</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 531

<sup>101</sup> NA WO 169/10252 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for December 1943

<sup>102</sup> NA WO 222/158 "Divisional Psychiatry": Report to the War Office by Major P.J.R. Davis, Psychiatrist attached to Headquarters, The British 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (SEAC) November 1943 to November 1945

<sup>103</sup> IWM 91/16/1 Captain H.M. Jones, *The Work of a Battalion Medical Officer*, pp. 4-5



'My corporal tried to kid me he had jaundice . . . damn fool, everyone knows jaundice is for officers only!'

(now known as Hepatitis B) spread by poorly sterilized syringes and the other, more common form (Hepatitis A) was shown to be a virus excreted in faeces. These discoveries had little impact upon the prevention of the disease during the war.<sup>105</sup> No explanation has been put forward as to why jaundice was “the officers’ illness”, although, given that its early symptoms included a lack of appetite, it may well have been misdiagnosed, or used as an excuse to give hard-press officers a short rest. Such an expedient was not without precedence. In a letter to his mother, one officer wrote: “A very small piece of a bomb did hit my thigh, but did not lodge therein; merely making a slight cut and a big bruise. However, the doctor has used it as an excuse to get me some rest, so for a few days I am living in a dressing station.”<sup>106</sup>

#### IV

Some illnesses had particular relevance to front line soldiers, being a direct outcome of the conditions in which they lived. The weather was appalling in the winter of 1943/1944 and the incidence of illnesses directly related to the inclement elements became more prevalent, although not particularly numerous, as the year progressed. Colds and influenza were common. In the first half of December 1943 “torrential rain fell incessantly turning the ground into a sea of mud. For days everyone was soaked to the skin ...”<sup>107</sup> With so many men soaked, it was no wonder that most had coughs and colds. “At night, it was said, British and German patrols were by now disclosing their presence to each other from afar by hacking coughs and explosive sneezes.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Taylor, *Front Line Nurse*, p. 100

<sup>105</sup> Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 133

<sup>106</sup> IWM 95/33/1 Major Philips. Letter, 16 October 1943

<sup>107</sup> NA WO 169/10252 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for December 1943

<sup>108</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 129



Exposure and trench foot in particular were both a direct result of conditions in the front line. Fighting in Italy resembled more and more the First World War Western Front, with men pinned down in holes in the ground by artillery fire for long periods, unable to move, to change clothes, or wash. The torrential winter rain ensured that every trench was filled with water and trench foot, or immersion foot as it was called, made its appearance. Trench foot was caused by prolonged standing in cold water or mud, and the continued wearing of wet socks. Contributory factors were the absence of hot food, insufficient clothing and lack of exercise.<sup>109</sup> The first 30 cases were reported in November 1943, among men who had spent up to six days in an exposed position on the mountainside under enemy observation.<sup>110</sup> A further 50 were reported in December. Most cases of immersion foot were mild, and rigid 'foot' discipline was immediately instigated. Men were advised that before going into action their feet should be thoroughly washed and dried, then dusted with Foot Powder. Each man carried a spare pair of socks, so that they could be worn on alternate days, and that where possible, hot meals or drinks should be given.<sup>111</sup> A Sock Laundry Service was opened in Roccamonfina in November 1943. The Laundry held new socks on a scale of 500 pairs per Brigade. As dirty socks came in to be washed they were exchanged for clean ones.<sup>112</sup>

The winter of 1944-45 was not very pleasant, very wet and cold, remembered a doctor from 46<sup>th</sup> Division. "We had many cases of pneumonia, and [sic] as the troops were very down at heart, away from home for a long time, the war was drawing to an end, and resistance to

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<sup>109</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division November 1943 Appendix H, 'Trench Foot', 12 November

<sup>110</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, pp. 547-8

<sup>111</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division November 1943

<sup>112</sup> Ibid

disease was low.”<sup>113</sup> Sick rates far exceeded casualty rates in Eighth Army for the first three months of 1945. Battle casualties totalled 2,109, with total sick standing at 12,510 and non-battle injuries at 1,780. The weather had obviously played its part in the level of illness in January, when gales and snowstorms meant that the men were in constant danger of frostbite and exposure.<sup>114</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (78<sup>th</sup> Division), however, reported “surprisingly few ill effects from cold and damp of living conditions” in January.<sup>115</sup> It was in February, when the 78<sup>th</sup> Division were transferred to the Eighth Army on the Adriatic Front, that the after-effects of the winter exposure seem to have made themselves felt. “Sickness, principally bronchial and rheumatic, attacked all but the most robust and though the majority of cases were not serious, the depletion of the ranks had a deleterious effect on training for the coming offensive and on morale, as extra duties devolved upon those sound in wind and limb.”<sup>116</sup>

## V

Another major drain on manpower was exhaustion in all its forms, ranging from extreme tiredness through to full-blown battle fatigue. The psychologist F.C. Bartlett emphasised the connections between physical fatigue and psychiatric breakdown in battle. ‘In war,’ he wrote, ‘there is perhaps no general condition which is more likely to produce a large crop of nervous and mental disorders than a state of prolonged and great fatigue’.<sup>117</sup> Loss of sleep interferes with the ability to think logically, to concentrate and remember, and it can produce uncharacteristic patterns of behaviour ranging from deep gloom to wild elation.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> IWM 91/16/1 Captain H.M. Jones Italy and Austria July 1944-November 1945

<sup>114</sup> Ray, *Algiers to Austria*, p. 189

<sup>115</sup> NA WO 170/4988 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders War Diary for January 1945

<sup>116</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, “No Silver Spoon”, Chapter X, pp.237-8

<sup>117</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 115

Simple exhaustion was a major factor in lowering a man's morale, his ability to fight or to put up with the conditions in which he finds himself: tired minds and bodies exaggerate terrible conditions. It was not surprising that men suffered from exhaustion. During daylight hours front-line troops were generally forced to remain in their slit trenches or sangars, and the continuous noise of shells and mortars, from both sides, which was so bad for the nerves, forced them to stay alert. At night, when they might have had a chance to sleep, there were supplies to see to and all the activities which could not be accomplished during daylight hours. Some men were "so exhausted that we slept for twelve hours through a series of barrages which were fired with the gun crews holding their hands against their ears."<sup>119</sup>

At Anzio most of the fighting took place at night, so few men managed a period of uninterrupted sleep. The 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards had no sleep for 72 hours during an engagement in February; the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish reported that all the men were "very tired through lack of sleep"; and the Royal Fusiliers noted: "troops now very tired after 20 days in the line"<sup>120</sup> There was no quiet spot in the beachhead and personnel who were at a 'B' Echelon [the battalion supply column or base] position for a rest said "Some rest!!!"<sup>121</sup> The exhaustion and noise became too much for some and they broke down. By January 30<sup>th</sup> 1944, a week after the landing, 1<sup>st</sup> Division was treating their first exhaustion cases. Immediate treatment consisted of the prophylactical application of barbiturates to enable a sustained period of complete rest. A large proportion of cases were returned to

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 124

<sup>119</sup> Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, pp.69-70

<sup>120</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for February 1944; NA WO 170/1434 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for February 1944; NA WO 170/1390 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Fusiliers War Diary for February 1944

unit after 48-72 hours.<sup>122</sup> On February 23<sup>rd</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> Division ADMS was visited by the Psychiatric Advisor (US Forces) AFHQ and Psychiatric Advisor 5 Army. "They had visited 3 Fd Amb and were impressed by the number of cases of 'exhaustion' returned to unit. Approx. Figures up to date show 60% RTU [Returned To Unit] of which some 10-15% relapse later."<sup>123</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Division opened an Exhaustion Centre with 100 beds and, at the end of March, a Psychiatric Centre located at 3 Field Ambulance with 100 "stretcher" beds under the supervision of Major Mason, a specialist in Psychological Medicine from 13 Corps.<sup>124</sup> At battalion and unit level, arrangements were made to give the men as much rest as possible as soon as operational considerations made it feasible. In March 'C' Company of the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens "started a shuttle service with their platoons, one platoon going back for 48 hours each day, and a fresh platoon comes out."<sup>125</sup> The Medical Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inniskillings started a rest centre in May so that two men per company could rest for a day.<sup>126</sup>

Official figures show that out of the original 15,979 men of 1<sup>st</sup> Division landed at Anzio on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 550 exhaustion cases were evacuated out of the beachhead by sea (see Table 1.11 at the end of the chapter). Battle fatigue or acute exhaustion therefore accounted for 3.4% of the total strength of the Division. This is a considerably higher figure than at Sicily, where less than 1% of the strength of 50<sup>th</sup> Division, for instance, suffered from battle fatigue. Being pinned down in a small bridgehead, permanently under the all-seeing eyes of the enemy and living in a state of semi-hysteria took its toll. Even the numerous

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<sup>121</sup> NA WO 170/1429 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Loyal Regiment War Diary for February 1944

<sup>122</sup> NA WO 177/375 Medical Diary - ADMS 1<sup>st</sup> Division January 1944

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, February 1944

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, March 1944

<sup>125</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for March 1944

nightingales who lived around the mouth of the Moletta, the ‘quiet’ sector at Anzio, could shred over-stretched nerves:

We had a lad who was with us who let them get on his nerves so much that he loosed off with his rifle every time he heard them sing – he was “bird-happy”, if ever I saw a man.<sup>127</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> Division maintained complete records of exhaustion cases at Anzio, with a follow-through on each case showing how many men were returned to their units, relapses and the number finally evacuated to hospital (Table 1.11). What is most striking about these figures is that it was not just front-line soldier who suffered from exhaustion. The stress at Anzio was all-encompassing, not just in the front line, as was normally the case. There is no indication of whether the sufferers were newcomers or old hands, but at the Fortress, a particularly dangerous stretch of the Anzio trench system, a lance-corporal who had been in Sicily was “one of the few Catania Plainites to have kept a sound nerve.”<sup>128</sup>

56<sup>th</sup> Division also registered an increasing numbers of men suffering physical exhaustion in the Anzio bridgehead from February 19<sup>th</sup>- March 4<sup>th</sup>:

Table 1.7  
56<sup>th</sup> Division Cases of Physical Exhaustion, Feb-March 1944<sup>129</sup>

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Officers:</u>	<u>O.R.s</u>
February 19:	-	68
February 26:	2	150
March 4:	1	170

These, of course, do not include the 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade totals listed under 1<sup>st</sup> Division for February 3<sup>rd</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, nor is there any indication how many these men were RTU and how many were evacuated. There are no figures for 5<sup>th</sup> Division.

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<sup>126</sup> NA WO 170/1403 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for May 1944

<sup>127</sup> W. Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio* (London: Pan Books, 1963) p. 220

<sup>128</sup> Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, p. 90

One observation about the 56<sup>th</sup> Division physical exhaustion figures is that officers seem to have suffered less, either because their responsibilities made them more resistant to battle fatigue or, more likely, because their condition was reported as some other medical condition. There was also more opportunity for officers to be sent on courses away from Anzio during the static warfare period and in this way get some much needed rest. A bomb-happy officer, after all, was a danger not only to himself but to the men under his command.

Commanders accepted the need for adequate rest for front line soldiers as long as operational requirements were satisfied. In early January 1945, for instance, a new 56<sup>th</sup> Division policy was decided upon. Each of the two brigades – 167<sup>th</sup> & 169<sup>th</sup> – would spend three weeks in the line, then be relieved by the other brigade. The brigade out of the line would spend its time with leave for the first week, and training and schemes for the second. The 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queen's diary opined, undoubtedly with past experiences in mind, that "the first week's programme sounds doubtful."<sup>130</sup> Another 56<sup>th</sup> Division initiative was a small party of two officers and 43 ORs sent to the Division from PAIFORCE, to be substituted for "war weary" personnel who had served under two years with the Division.<sup>131</sup>

At the other end of the exhaustion spectrum were those men who broke down completely. The most common precipitating cause was the real or imagined "near miss", which was the origin of the term "shell shock". "It is a condition of impaired military efficiency shown

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<sup>129</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diaries – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division February and March 1944

<sup>130</sup> NA WO 170/5060 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for January 1945

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, War Diary for February 1945

most characteristically in terms of loss of fighting morale.”<sup>132</sup> Immediate predisposing factors for breakdowns were to be found in domestic stress, frequently accelerated by the absence of mail, and the death of a close comrade. In general, the better the discipline in a unit, the fewer the cases of battle fatigue. “Far too many men have broken down because of having indifferent officers.”<sup>133</sup> If an officer failed to spot a man who was on the verge of breaking down, that single individual could have a disastrous effect on the morale of the whole unit, just as an unwilling soldier was a danger to his comrades and a source of low morale. Battle fatigue could affect anyone, veterans and inexperienced newcomers, officers and ORs. There was often a sense of “there, but for the grace of God ...” In his memoirs, sapper Richard Eke recalled that he was getting water from the top of a cliff near the landing beach in Sicily when he came across “an infantry corporal huddled in the rocks. He looked to be in trouble, but we found he was not wounded only shell-shocked, and crying like a child for his mother. We could not persuade him to leave his fox-hole and we left him in peace, at least until the next [air] raid.”<sup>134</sup> Another incident occurred at the beginning of an attack:

A few of the shells dropped short and this didn't help matters. One of my men started screaming at the top of his voice. Absolutely hysterical. It only wants someone to do that and it has a very adverse effect of the company who are already tensed up. I caught hold of him by the front of his battledress and said 'I am telling you to stop that noise!' It didn't make a scrap of difference at all to him, he just kept on screaming. Imagine it, rain, two haystacks alight, ground soggy, going into the attack and there was this man creating an unpleasant situation. I knew there was only one thing I could do – I hit him with my fist on the chin and it stopped him!..... As far as he was concerned that was the end of his fighting, he went back as a battle exhaustion case and I didn't ever see him again.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>132</sup> CMAC GC/192/18, Palmer, “The Problem, of the P & N Casualty”, p. 4

<sup>133</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 51

<sup>134</sup> IWM 92/1/1 C.R. Eke, “A Game of Soldiers”, p. 27

<sup>135</sup> Major L. Stringer, B. Coy, 16<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry, quoted in Hart, *Heat of Battle*, p.193

Some exhausted soldiers were dealt with by their own officers rather than going to the RAP. Lance Corporal Allnutt was asked by his CSM to look after a young fusilier who was “bomb happy” and was upsetting those around him. The CSM believed that Allnutt was not worried about the shelling and that his courage would be infectious.<sup>136</sup> Others were “stiffened” by regular discipline.

A round dozen men from 3 Coy (admittedly rather shaken from the previous day) went “bomb happy” and found their way back to the RAP where they exhibited all the symptoms of what in the last war was known as “shell shock”.... In this particular case all the men, who were not absolutely out of their minds, were assembled in three ranks outside the RAP, treated exactly as if on parade and marched back in quick time to their Coy.<sup>137</sup>

Despite its experiences in North Africa and Tunisia, the British Army remained reluctant to institutionalise forward psychiatry and no provision was made for forward treatment in the planning of the invasion for Sicily. Only one psychiatrist was made available to work with British troops in Sicily.<sup>138</sup> The rising tide of breakdowns, however, ensured that a number of psychiatrists were swiftly drafted into Italy. The reporting of exhaustion only became standardised in February 1944. From that time “Exhaustion (including all cases of nervous and physical exhaustion, however caused), Anxiety Neurosis and Hysteria” were to be referred to as “*Sickness* and not as Battle Casualties”.<sup>139</sup>

Exhaustion and “bomb happy” cases were usually evacuated as soon as possible before they could have a direct and immediate effect on the morale of their fellow soldiers. “There was no way of knowing which men will stand up well to battle. The big, manly

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<sup>136</sup> IWM 80/46/1 G. Allnutt, “A Fusilier Remembers”, p. 75

<sup>137</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for January 1944

<sup>138</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 185

<sup>139</sup> NA WO 170/1 G1 (BR) AFHQ, General Routine Orders by General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, Mediterranean Theatre, 18 February 1944. Part II, Adjutant-General’s Branch 107, Casualties – Reporting of Exhaustion



types seemed to have been the ones who broke first.”<sup>140</sup> The average case, whether it was a battle weary veteran or a novice cracking under sudden and violent strain, was treated at the Corps Exhaustion Centre, run by the Corps Psychiatric team. Over one third of the men were returned to their units within five days. A further 10% were also able to return after longer treatment, which took place either at a Base Psychiatric Centre or at the Reinforcement, Reallocation and Training Centre, originally known as the Rehabilitation Centre.<sup>141</sup> The Rehabilitation Centre was opened at the end of January, 1944. Earlier that month, with a new offensive at its height, so-called psycho-neurotics were arriving in hospitals at the rate of some 50 a day. The IRTD [Infantry Replacement Training Depot] was full to capacity and the newly-arrived psycho-neurotics were being discharged from hospital to 159 Transit Camp. There they were left to their own devices and that was having a bad effect on them. These men fell into three categories: those who had been downgraded and were waiting shipment to North Africa; those requiring just a short period of rest and rehabilitation; and those awaiting treatment by the psychiatrist before a definite decision could be made. The majority fell into the last category.<sup>142</sup>

At the Rehabilitation Centre men were reassured that they were in no way abnormal, that they were still soldiers and perfectly able to cope with life on equal terms with their fellow men. They were treated as soldiers, and given basic military training although it was considered best to avoid battle training and to concentrate on “peace-time soldier training”.<sup>143</sup> The treatment of psycho-neurotics was gaining in importance for two

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<sup>140</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13251 K.C. Lovell, Reel 9

<sup>141</sup> NA CAB1021/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 10

<sup>142</sup> NA 204/6633 Psycho-Neurotics (Rehabilitation Group) January –August 1944, letter from DAG, 25 January

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, Letter from DAG, 29 January 1944

principal reasons: the conservation of manpower and the conservation of finance. Firstly, shortage of manpower meant that troops who could be returned to their original units, or re-graded and re-trained, could remain part of the war effort. Secondly there was the worry that if a man were left for ever as “bomb happy” he could remain neurotic all his life and eventually claim on the Ministry of Pensions.<sup>144</sup> During one month of the new practice at the Rehabilitation Centre about 100 men were “recovered”, and about one third of them “actually volunteered to return to their units in the line.”<sup>145</sup>

Psychiatric disorders, apart from exhaustion cases, accounted for only 20 out of 1,000 hospital admissions in 1944 (compared to 50 out of 1,000 for VD cases).<sup>146</sup> Total British admissions to the Advance Psychiatric Wing for the first two months of 1944 were 355. Of these 29 were from the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal West Kents and 25 were from the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Essex Regiment, six of whom legally suffered from a mental handicap. Both units were from the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division. Another nine were from the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents (78<sup>th</sup> Division). Thus, one-fifth of all British Army admissions were from just three infantry units. The blame for such a high figure in these battalions was laid fair and square on two factors: the failure of the RMOs of the units to weed out unsuitable men, and the bad psychological sorting of the ‘intake’ in the UK, since these men should never have been posted to first line infantry units.<sup>147</sup> Subsequently, the CO of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents pointed out that only a very small percentage of the battalion’s exhaustion cases were original members of the battalion. “They joined as reinforcements during the action and

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, Letter from DAG, 20 February 1944, p. 1

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, DAG letter, 20 February 1944, p. 1

<sup>146</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 504, Table 34

<sup>147</sup> NA WO 204/6633 Psycho-Neurotics (Rehabilitation Group) January-August 44, Letter from ADMS, 14 February 1944

never had the advantage of sub-unit training before going into action and consequently had to fight as an individual rather than as a sec. or pl. with the usual poor results.”<sup>148</sup> In the 5<sup>th</sup> Essex there were “reinforcements from 22 different regiments within the battalion and nobody knows anybody else... people are rather on the jumpy side owing to this.”<sup>149</sup> “The presence of reinforcements in large number who were not of the highest standard” was cited as a contributory factor to degraded morale.<sup>150</sup>

“It is generally accepted that the number of psychiatric battle casualties, relative to total casualty, that occur, gives a fairly accurate index of morale.”<sup>151</sup> 78<sup>th</sup> Division, which had the highest desertion rate of all British formations between October-December, 1944, also had the highest psychiatric casualties. 1<sup>st</sup> Division’s rates were considerably lower, as were its desertion figures:

**Table 1.8**  
**Divisional Psychiatric Casualties as a percentage of Total Battle Casualties**<sup>152</sup>

<u>Formation:</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>November</u>	<u>December</u>
78 <sup>th</sup> Division:	22.0	37.0	23.0
1 <sup>st</sup> Division:	7.9	9.0	7.0

The psychiatrists were brought in to look closely at 78<sup>th</sup> Division. Lt.-Col J.D.M. Pearce, Adviser in Psychiatry, AFHQ noted that morale was “essentially a factor of mental health.” He wrote: “Weighting for the degree and duration of stress and incidence of desertion, self-inflicted wounds, venereal disease and psychiatric illness prove a good index of the state of morale.” He continued:

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, Letter from CO, 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents, 8 April 1944

<sup>149</sup> LHCMA 4/2 Lt.-General C.W. Allfrey, Diary of Campaign, Italy, 22 December 1943-8 August 1944, Friday 14 January 1944

<sup>150</sup> NA WO 222/158 “Divisional Psychiatry”: Report to the War Office by Major Davis

<sup>151</sup> Ibid

<sup>152</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 516

The practical value of this is instanced by the observation that the psychiatric battle ratio (i.e. psychiatric casualties + all casualties x a hundred) was much greater in 78 Division during the winter than any of its sister Divisions, led to a scrutiny of all personnel in that Division during a retraining period in March, and 1% of the whole division was deemed unfit for battle, 90% fit and apparently 9% uncertain. The sequel was that the Division did well in battle and had a low psychiatric battle ratio.<sup>153</sup>

There is no indication whether those deemed unfit or uncertain for battle came from the rifle companies. Psychiatrist Major Palmer classified soldiers' breakdowns as follows:

**Table 1.9**  
**Classification of Main Syndromes in Percentages<sup>154</sup>**  
**For every 100 cases allow two Psychotics**

Simple Stress Reaction:

a. Simple loss of grip	30%	
b. Simple anxiety reaction	15%	
c. Simple anxiety with hysterical features	<u>20%</u>	<u>65%</u>

True Illness Reaction:

a. True Battle Anxiety State	15%	
b. True Battle Dissociative State	10%	
c. Acute Battle Anxiety Hysteria	3%	
d. Guardmen's Hysteria	2%	
e. True Campaign Neurosis (the burnt-out soldier)	<u>5%</u>	<u>35%</u>
		<u>100%</u>

Simple Stress Reaction was associated with men of poor morale, who generally just "threw in the sponge". Many of them could be returned to full duty after a short course of continuous narcosis. Many of the victims of True Illness Reaction were men of high morale, who became "bomb-happy". It was possible for such men to be returned to duty after a course of continuous narcosis and a fairly long period of rehabilitation. Palmer wrote: "I consider such men are very brave and must suffer from much anguish in so returning to duty." Thousands of men of high morale carried on in the service of their

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<sup>153</sup> CMAC GC/192/18 J.D.M. Pearce, Report by Advisor in Psychiatry, September 1945 Morale

country, despite being near breakdown. "As might be expected, this condition is most frequently found in N.C.Os and Officers and is most particularly common amongst Medical Officers, the compassionate nature of whose duties induces them to carry on long past the stage when they should have reported sick."<sup>155</sup>

His study of burnt-out soldiers prompted Palmer to ask "what is the morale life of an average well-trained man?" His answer, in terms of a single intensive day and night situation, was five days. In terms of more or less intermittent action, nine months. In terms of active service overseas, two years, "with the incidence of factors expressive of demoralisation commencing to express themselves after 18 months, and having a sharp increment after 21 months."<sup>156</sup> Many infantrymen in Italy, particularly from the Regular Divisions such as 1<sup>st</sup> Division, were on active service overseas for far longer than two years, so it is perhaps not surprising that men eventually succumbed to battle fatigue and totally degraded morale. One Guardsman remembered the nerve-shredding cumulative effect of battle:

Jerry was on his mountain. Every so often he'd lob a salvo of mortar bombs at us from behind his peak – you'd hear a sort of multiple cough in the distance and the next thing would be a whistling glissando of sound that screwed your nerves up against the blast. You felt yourself shrivelling up inside your skin just waiting for the explosion. Every near-miss destroyed something in your brain, so you were less prepared for the next stonk when it came. One poor bloke got up from his shelter and walked among the falling shells as though he was looking for something he'd lost.....You didn't have to get your flesh ripped apart to become a casualty of war.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> CMAC GC/192/18, Major H.A. Palmer, "The Problem of the P & N Casualty – a Study of 12,000 Cases", pp.4-5

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>157</sup> IWM 87/42/1 L. Waller, p. 61

## VI

There is little evidence to suggest, overall, that during the Italian campaign the sick rate was a manifestation of poor morale. Indeed, what few reports there are of malingering suggest not poor fighting spirit but rather a dislike of army life in general. One sapper remembers that the prospect of an Army inspection, after nine months of freedom from the discipline of normal army life since he had left England

aroused more fear than would the news of another forthcoming beach assault. There was only way out, and that was in the morning to report 'sick'.

The next morning almost half the platoon were on 'sick parade'. We were taken to the Medical Officer at Taranto. As each Sapper entered the surgery with a petty complaint, so the M.O.'s temper increased as he realised he was dealing with malingerers. I was one of the last to go in, fitter than I had ever been in my life, but complaining of the only blemish I could find, a wart on my back. It must have been the last straw, I received his full rage with a needle wielded like a bayonet just below my shoulder blade. I let out an uncontrollable howl of shock and pain at the unexpected treatment, and was dismissed. We arrived back at the camp and were put on cleaning duties for the rest of the day. We found out that the parade had been cancelled and the rest of the platoon [had] been given the day off in Taranto.<sup>158</sup>

That is not to say that men did not try to avoid battle by reporting sick. Men who were hypochondriacs, or work-shy, in "civvie street" retained these traits in the army. Medical Officers who knew the men in their units dealt with malingers robustly and sent them back to duty. Such cases were never recorded, either in battalion or medical diaries. There were also cases of men perhaps unconsciously exaggerating the effects of wounds. One Guardsman who suffered a hand injury wrote about the Medical Board he was sent before to see whether he was fit enough to rejoin his regiment. "After they'd studied my medical history the senior surgeon held my left hand in his and asked me to squeeze as hard as I

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<sup>158</sup> IWM 92/1/1 C.R. Eke, p. 74

could. Well, he seemed a bit disappointed with my efforts, but he didn't say anything..."

The soldier was re-graded B1.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. B1 meant that I was unfit for active service. It meant that I would probably crawl out of this war with nothing worse than a missing finger. Couldn't I have squeezed that MO's hand a bit harder if I'd really wanted to? Or had I cheated and deliberately saved my miserable skin? It was something I would have on my conscience for the rest of my life, I knew that.<sup>159</sup>

True malingering, if the number of men charged under Section 18 of the Army Act (Disgraceful Conduct, which covered a wide range of misconduct, including malingering, self-injury, wilfully prolonging or aggravating a disease or infirmity, and stealing or receiving stolen army property) are reliable, would appear to have been a minor concern, particularly as there is no way of knowing how many of the men were charged specifically with malingering or wilful prolonging a disease or infirmity, as against stealing army property, in order to avoid active service. Table 1.10 (below) gives the number of men charged under Section 18 in Italy, on a monthly basis. There are a few points to make about the figures. Firstly, the figures gathered prior to June 1944 may be an under-representation in that infantrymen attached to armoured divisions have not been included in the infantry totals. Secondly, the sudden rise in the percentage of infantrymen charged in June of 1944 was due to a change in the way GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon recorded their statistics. Previously the numbers were gathered by formation, with the highest number of offences being recorded for GHQ, Army and Corps troops. From June 1944 onwards, the statistics were recorded by service arm, and this saw the infantry percentage rise dramatically. Thirdly, the rise in the infantry percentage for November 1943 is misleading in that four of the nine infantrymen charged under Section 18 came from 51<sup>st</sup> Division, which was at that time undertaking garrison duties in Sicily while awaiting return to the UK.

Figure 1.10

Monthly No. of British soldiers charged under Section 18 of The Army Act<sup>160</sup>

<u>Month:</u>	<u>Overall</u> <u>Army Nos.</u>	<u>Infantry</u> <u>Nos:</u>	<u>Infantry</u> <u>Percentage</u>
<b>1943</b>			
July	58	17	29.3%
August	40	2	5.0%
September	61	1	1.6%
October	36	0	0.0%
November	51	7	13.7%
December	81	4	4.9%
<b>1944:</b>			
January	64	5	7.8%
February	78	8	10.3%
March	80	1	1.3%
April	44	1	2.3%
May	<u>58</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6.9%</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>7.6%</b>
<b>1944 (cont):</b>			
June	76	20	26.3%
July	44	13	29.5%
August	74	29	39.1%
September	55	15	27.3%
October	67	19	28.3%
November	55	9	16.7%
December	46	22	47.8%
<b>1945:</b>			
January	130	22	16.9%
February	93	17	18.3%
March	72	29	40.3%
April	<u>124</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>35.5%</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>836</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>28.9%</b>

One psychiatrist wrote that “actual malingering is rare, though by no means unknown. It is fair to record that the psychiatrist is less likely than any other responsible officer to be

<sup>159</sup> IWM 87/42/1 L. Waller, pp. 66-67

<sup>160</sup> The monthly figures are taken from weekly GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon Summary of Offences, British Formation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diaries, as follows: NA WO 169/8439 War Diaries for July-September 1943. NA WO 169/8440 War Diaries for October-December 1943. NA WO 170/40 War Diary for January 1944. NA WO 170/41 War Diary for February 1944. NA WO 170/42 War Diary for March 1944. NA WO 170/43 War Diary for April 1944. NA WO 170/44 War Diary for May-June 1944. NA WO 170/45 War Diary for July 1944. NA WO 170/46 War Diary for August 1944. NA WO 170/47 War Diary for September 1944. NA WO 170/49 War Diary for October 1944. NA WO 170/50 War Diary for November 1944. NA WO 170/51 War Diary for December 1944. NA WO 170/4125 War Diary for January 1945. NA WO 1709/4126 War Diary for February 1945. NA WO 170/4127 War Diary for March 1945 and NA WO 170/4128 War Diary for April 1945



deceived by the malingerer. Conscious exaggeration of symptoms is common and is a useful indication of the impoverishment of the man's morale."<sup>161</sup> It was not so easy to gauge the validity of symptoms presented to a psychiatrist rather than the battalion MO. Some men deliberately exhibited psychiatric symptoms to avoid duty. Psychiatrist Major H.A. Palmer wrote that he viewed all patients who claimed amnesia with suspicion, especially when he scrutinised the periods for which the amnesia was claimed. "Up to 33% of cases will claim loss of memory of which only 13% are genuine."<sup>162</sup> In the early days of the war "psychiatric cases poured into British Military Hospitals, their symptoms being mainly related to gastro-intestinal tract."<sup>163</sup> The exaggeration of gastric symptoms was not uncommon, and tended to increase with each admission to hospital. It was decided that all cases of functional dyspepsia [indigestion with no discernible organic cause] should be returned to their units, "where many of them subsequently became useful soldiers. Following the adoption of this policy the wastage due to the gastric neuroses was checked."<sup>164</sup> As the war progressed treatment of neurotics was evolved to avoid reinforcing in the patient's mind that he was a sick man and therefore unable to fight.<sup>165</sup>

## VI

It would appear, therefore, that malingerers were a drop in the ocean compared to the number of men away from their units through genuine illness. Equally, there is little evidence to suggest that large numbers of men deliberately courted illness. The men who suffered from malaria did so initially through a lack of adequate preparations across much of the army, the difficulty in utilizing the approved prophylaxis in front-line conditions, or

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<sup>161</sup> J.D.W. Pearce, MD, FRCPEd., DPM, Lieut-Col. RAMC, Command Psychiatrist, "Clinical Aspects of Psychiatric Problems in the Army", *The Practitioner*, Vol. 154, pp 33-38, January 1945

<sup>162</sup> CMAC, GC/192/18, H.A. Palmer, "The Problem of The P. & N. Casualty – A Study of 12,000 Cases"

<sup>163</sup> H.J.C.J. L'Etang, "A Criticism of Military Psychiatry in the Second World War", Part III, Historical Survey, *The Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, Vol. XCVII, No. 5, November 1951, pp 316-324

through ignorance. As the illness became better understood and more effective preventative measures were enacted, the number of sufferers fell. Very few of the large number of VD cases can be directly attributed to a reluctance to fight, although anecdotal evidence indicated that some deserters were willing to mimic the symptoms to avoid prison.<sup>166</sup> It is impossible to say what percentage of sufferers were infantrymen, but they had fewer opportunities to contract a venereal disease than the majority of the army permanently in the rear. The principal causes of the rising VD rate were the ready availability of poverty-stricken women, and the lengthy time away from home of many of the soldiers.

Infantrymen were particularly liable to occupational illnesses such as trench foot, exposure, bronchial and rheumatic conditions, skin ailments and fatigue. There was a strong connection between fatigue and psychiatric breakdown in battle. Some of the men who suffered from battle fatigue needed a short period of rest away from the line. Others required far longer palliative care. Nine months of more or less intermittent front line action was regarded as the morale life of an average well-trained man. Many front-line infantrymen in Italy were on active service for far longer than that and yet remained capable of front-line duty.

The high rate of sickness in the Italian campaign was not an indication of poor morale. It was the result of ignorance, of too long an absence from home and family, and of the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid

<sup>165</sup> CMAC GC/192/18 H.A. Hunter, "The Problem of the P & N Casualty", p. 3

<sup>166</sup> See E. Taylor, *Combat Nurse* (London: Robert Hale, 1999) p. 178. ".... They [deserters] discovered that the easiest way to escape from arrest was to get into hospital for treatment. A way of achieving this was to be diagnosed as suffering from venereal disease, then rife in southern Italy. A deserter would deliberately burn a

conditions under which the soldiers laboured. While not the product of poor morale, its prevalence drained manpower and forced a decreasing number of men to shoulder an increasingly heavy burden of fighting to the detriment of their morale. The remaining rifleman found himself “a sentry more often, with bigger gaps between sections and generally far more lonely.”<sup>167</sup>

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sore on the end of his penis with a lighted cigarette. This they thought would look like the typical syphilitic chancre when seen hurriedly by doctors and nurses.”

<sup>167</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 36

**Table 1.11**  
**1<sup>ST</sup> Division Exhaustion Cases – January 22<sup>nd</sup>–June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944<sup>168</sup>**

Units	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
<u>24<sup>th</sup> Guards Brigade</u>						
5 Gren Gds	41	7	-	-	22	19
1 Scots Gds	47	7	-	-	23	24
1 Irish Gds	26	1	-	-	18	8
Total:	114	15	-	-	63	51
<u>2 Infantry Brigade</u>						
HQ:	2	-	-	-	2	-
1 Loyals	61	12	2	1	36	25
2 N. Staffs	83	16	2	-	58	25
6 Gordons	49	8	1	-	32	17
Total:	195	36	5	1	128	67
<u>3 Infantry Brigade</u>						
HQ:	2	-	-	-	-	2
1 D.W.K.	68	9	1	-	44	24
2 Foresters	117	19	3	-	68	49
1 K.S.L.I.	117	24	1	-	79	38
Total:	304	52	5	-	191	113
<u>R.A.</u>						
2 Fd Regt R.A.	9	-	-	-	6	3
19 Fd Regt R.A.	56	12	3	-	37	19
67 Fd Regt R.A.	11	-	-	-	5	6
81 A/TTk Regt R.A.	11	-	-	-	5	6
90 Lt A/A Regt R.A.	22	5	-	-	11	11
Total:	109	17	3	-	64	45
<u>R.E.</u>						
6 Fd Pk Coy R.E.	2	-	-	-	2	-
23 Fd Coy R.E.	16	3	-	-	14	2
238 Fd Coy R.E.	20	2	-	-	12	8
248 Fd Coy R.E.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total:	38	5	-	-	28	10
<u>Others:</u>						
2/7 Mx Regt	43	8	2	-	28	15
1 Recce Regt	36	2	-	-	27	9
R.A.S.C.	1	-	-	-	-	1
Sigs	4	-	-	-	3	1
Med	20	1	-	-	10	10
Ord	1	-	-	-	1	-
R.E.M.E.	7	-	-	-	6	1
H.Q. 1 Div	1	-	-	-	1	-
Total:	113	11	2	-	76	37
<u>GRAND TOTAL:</u>	<u>873</u>	<u>136</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>550</u>	<u>323</u>
Units	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)

<sup>168</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 14/1 1<sup>st</sup> Division Exhaustion Cases

168 Infantry Brigade(attached temporarily to  
1<sup>st</sup> Division, Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>)

1 L.I.R.	21	2	-	-	13	8	
1 London Scots	33	-	-	-	22	11	
10 R. Berks		35	2	-	-	17	18
510 Fd Coy R.E.	15	3	-	-	13	2	
168 Inf Bde Sp Gp	2	-	-	-	1	1	
Total:		106	7	-	-	66	40
40 Commando		11	-	-	-	7	4

Notes:

- (a) Number of men admitted counting first admission ONLY
- (b) Number of men admitted for a second time, i.e. cases in column (a) who were RTU after original admission and were re-admitted for a second time
- (c) Number of men admitted for a third time, i.e. cases in columns (a) and (b) who were RTU on two separate occasions and were re-admitted for a third time
- (d) Similarly man admitted on four separate occasions
- (e) Final disposal by evacuation by sea
- (f) Number of men whose final disposal was RTU; excluding men who were RTU on first, second, etc., occasion and then finally evacuated by Hospital Ship.

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## CHAPTER II

### CASUALTIES

Illness, not battle casualties, was the main drain on manpower in the Italian campaign. There were occasions, however, when battle casualties exceeded the number of sick. In the first ten complete days of battle of Operation HONKER (the final battle for Cassino), for instance, the number of wounded evacuated from the front area was 6,979, against 5,286 sick evacuated.<sup>1</sup> During the whole period from May 11<sup>th</sup>-June 30<sup>th</sup> 1944, Eighth Army Field Medical Units admitted 14,133 battle casualties as against 13,375 sick.<sup>2</sup>

A high casualty rate was one of the elements listed by Lt.-Col Sparrow as a major cause of degraded morale.<sup>3</sup> High casualty rates were also cited by the British psychiatrist Robert Ahrenfeldt, who wrote the seminal work on psychiatry in the British army in the Second World War, as one of the factors which had a detrimental effect on morale.<sup>4</sup> The question of whether it is possible to assess to what extent casualty rates influenced the morale of fighting soldiers in Italy is examined in this chapter. The areas of investigation are: casualty rates in both offensive and defensive operations; the effect of a high casualty rate on battalion organization and efficiency; the range of wounds suffered; the infantrymen's attitude to casualties; and, finally, their impact on morale, through an examination of the number of self-inflicted wounds, deserters and men absent without leave.

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<sup>1</sup> NA WO 204/7949 Medical Aspects of Operation HONKER (Operation against Cassino 11 May-30 June 1944) DDMS Eighth Army

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Sparrow, *Morale*

## I

In any assessment of the effect of casualties on fighting spirit, consideration must first be given to the number and type of casualties. The nature of the fighting in Italy, usually against well-defended enemy positions on the commanding heights, or across rivers with the Germans well dug-in on the opposite banks, invariably meant that there would be relatively high casualty rates. Between September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943 to May 19<sup>th</sup> 1945, two weeks after the German surrender in Italy, there were 6,299 officer and 86,805 OR verified battle casualties.<sup>5</sup> The majority were front-line troops. According to Gary Sheffield, in the North African and Italian campaigns the average casualty per battalion per month was 70. But, on some occasions, casualty rates matched anything in Normandy, where the average was 100 casualties per battalion per month, and where 175 per month “was not uncommon”. In the “bloodbath” of the Western Front of the First World War, casualties averaged 100 per battalion per month. However, in the Second World War, “... casualties were sustained by a relatively small sector of the military population.”<sup>6</sup> With a decrease in the “teeth” to “tail” ratio, rifle companies suffered a disproportionately high rate of casualties.<sup>7</sup> This was certainly true for the Italian Campaign, for between September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943 and July 31<sup>st</sup> 1944, Guards and Infantry OR casualties were recorded as 38,232, or 71.6% of total battle casualties for that period.<sup>8</sup> Figures gleaned from battalion diaries during offensive operations show just how debilitating the casualty rates could be, particularly in offensive periods.

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<sup>4</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, pp. 208-9

<sup>5</sup> NA WO 170/4129 GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon, CMF War Diary for May 1945

<sup>6</sup> G. Sheffield, “The Shadow of the Somme: the Influence of the First World War on British Soldiers’ Perceptions and Behaviour on the Second World War”, in P. Addison & A. Calder, (eds.), *Time To Kill, The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997) pp. 35-6.

<sup>7</sup> In 1918, 32% of the British Expeditionary Force were front line troops; in the Second World War the figure was 25%. Figures taken from Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, p. 4; and Englander and Mason, *The British Soldier in World War II*, p. 2

At the very start of the Italian campaign, one of the bloodiest engagements in Sicily was the battle for Primosole Bridge, the key to Montgomery's advance into the Plain of Catania. The attempts to capture the bridge, by the three Durham Light Infantry battalions of 151 Brigade (50<sup>th</sup> Division), was abortive and costly. Total casualties in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion were 120 killed, wounded or missing.<sup>9</sup> This was a large proportion of the total battalion losses for the whole of the Sicilian campaign, which amounted to 17 officers and 194 ORs, killed, died of wounds, wounded or missing.<sup>10</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry lost nine officers and 247 ORs killed, died of wounds, wounded and missing (26% of officers and 34% of ORs, given an average War Establishment of 35 officers and 726 ORs in 50<sup>th</sup> Division battalions at the start of the Sicilian Campaign).<sup>11</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> DLI losses were 25 officers and 283 ORs (71% of officers and 39% of ORs). A 6<sup>th</sup> DLI platoon commander's diary entry at Primosole recorded:

Men who had served in the battalion since France in 1940, at Gazala, Alamein and Mareth had not seen so much slaughter and destruction in such a small space. The area around the 8<sup>th</sup> bridgehead and along the sunken road where we and 9<sup>th</sup> attacked was a shambles, 500 casualties had occurred in our three battalions, representing 1 in every 2 men in the assault. Over 300 German dead lay there, torn trees, smashed guns, tanks and equipment everywhere. Now little rough wooden crosses made from ration boxes began to appear as we buried our dead. There was one grave of 20 men of the Battalion in our company area.<sup>12</sup>

Such high casualties were a considerable blow to the brigade, but even more importantly, the casualties were from the rifle companies, where roughly three quarters of the battalions' fighting strength was destroyed. Morale in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division plummeted with the losses at

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<sup>8</sup> NA WO 162/279 Manpower & Wastage, Italy

<sup>9</sup> NA WO 169/10203 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry War Diary for July 1943

<sup>10</sup> NA WO 162/291 Infantry Rifles: Battle Casualties Sicily



Primosole and the divisional medical war diary remarked, with typical British understatement, that “even some of the old soldiers were a bit jumpy.”<sup>13</sup>

The Durham Light Infantry were not the only infantry battalions to suffer heavy losses in Sicily. The number of officers and men killed, died of wounds, wounded or missing for three other battalions was:

Table 2.1 Infantry Battle Casualties, Sicily <sup>14</sup> Percentage of Officer and O.R. Losses				
<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Casualties</u>		<u>Percentage of Battalion</u>	
	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers	12	206	33%	25% <sup>15</sup>
1 <sup>st</sup> York & Lancaster	21	215	60%	30% <sup>16</sup>
1 <sup>st</sup> KOYLI	17	170	49%	23% <sup>17</sup>

The total number of British army personnel killed between July 10<sup>th</sup> and August 18<sup>th</sup> in Sicily was 213 officers and 1,952 ORs: 507 officers and 5,830 ORs were wounded, with 94 officers and 1,521 ORs posted missing.<sup>18</sup> Total battle casualties, all ranks, were 10,117 (5.4% of the estimated average strength of British Army forces in Sicily). Most were in the Infantry, which lost 17% of its total officer strength and 11.3% of ORs. In comparison (see Table 2.2) the Royal Artillery (Field) lost considerably fewer men.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, NA WO 169/10203 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry, War Establishment 35 officers and 726 ORs; NA WO 169/10177 10<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Berkshire Regiment, War Establishment 35 officers and 726 ORs; NA WO 169/10308 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The East Yorkshire Regiment, War Establishment 35 officers and 727 ORs

<sup>12</sup> IWM 84/2/1 Colonel D.J. Fenner, p. 9

<sup>13</sup> NA WO 177/401 Medical Diary – ADMS 50<sup>th</sup> Division September 1943 Hygiene Report, 10 September

<sup>14</sup> NA WO 162/291 Infantry Rifles. Battle Casualties Sicily.

<sup>15</sup> NA WO 170/10235 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal Irish Fusiliers War Establishment 36 Officers and 815 ORs

<sup>16</sup> NA WO 169/10310 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The York & Lancaster Regiment War Establishment 35 officers and 726 ORs

<sup>17</sup> NA WO 169/10244 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Establishment 35 officers and 726 ORs

<sup>18</sup> NA WO 162/291 Casualty figures taken from Final Returns: Sicily – Battle Casualties

Table 2.2

**Sicily Wastage, British Service Only: 10 June-18 August, 1943<sup>19</sup>**

<u>Arm</u>	Estimated Average		Battle Casualties		Sickness	
	Strength of Forces		(K, W & M)		(Estimated)	
	<u>Officer</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>
Infantry <sup>20</sup>	2,295	40,826	391 (17.0%)	4,604 (11.3%)	69 (3.0%)	1,117 (3.0%)
RA Field	1,233	17,571	55 (4.5%)	358 (2.0%)	37 (3.0%)	480 (2.7%)
RE	706	17,818	27 (3.8%)	386 (2.2%)	16 (2.3%)	493 (2.7%)
Army Air Corps	170	5,127	12 (7.1%)	323 (6.3%)	9 (5.3%)	170 (3.3%)

At Salerno, Battle casualties admitted to the Main Dressing Station of the 46<sup>th</sup> Division in the first few days of Operation AVALANCHE were: September 9<sup>th</sup> – 274: September 10<sup>th</sup> – 111: September 12<sup>th</sup> – 141. By September 16<sup>th</sup> battle casualties were approximately 5% of the Division, principally, of course, from among the front line infantry.<sup>21</sup> There was such a shortage of infantry after the first few days ashore that all available men were seconded into the front line – men from the Recce Regiment, beach landing parties, Royal Engineers, clerks, cooks and truck drivers.<sup>22</sup> Even lightly wounded infantrymen were asked to go back to Battipaglia.<sup>23</sup> In the 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions, from September 9<sup>th</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup> 1943 the smallest number of casualties endured by any battalion was 11 officers and 115 ORs.

Some battalions suffered far great losses, as can be seen from the percentages of losses based on a best-case scenario of a full War Establishment for each battalion:

<sup>19</sup> NA WO 162/291 Sicily Wastage – British Service Only

<sup>20</sup> Infantry, Rifle & Motor, including Foot Guards

<sup>21</sup> NA WO 177/394 Medical Diary – ADMS 46<sup>th</sup> Division September 1943

<sup>22</sup> V. Selwyn, D. Davin, E. deMauny, I. Fletcher (eds.), *From Oasis Into Italy, War Poems and Diaries from North Africa to Italy, 1940-1946* (London: Shephard-Walwyn Publishers, 1983) p. 180; Elliott, *Esprit de Corps*, p. 56; Hickey & Smith, *Operation Avalanche*, p. 147; Ibid, p. 177

<sup>23</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 147

**Table 2.3**  
**Percentage of Battalion Strength Lost through Casualties**  
**9 September-31 October, 1943<sup>24</sup>**

<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Casualties</u>		<u>Percentage</u>	
	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Hamps	11	354	30.6%	43.8%
1/4 <sup>th</sup> Hamps	16	287	44.4%	32.2%
2/4 <sup>th</sup> K.O.Y.L.I.	22	426	61.1%	52.7%
5 <sup>th</sup> Foresters	23	537	63.9%	66.4%
16 <sup>th</sup> D.L.I.	13	367	37.1%	45.4%
9 <sup>th</sup> R.F.	25	547	69.4%	67.6%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Coldstream Guards	24	282	66.7%	34.7%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Scots Guards	27	304	75.0%	37.6% <sup>25</sup>
<b>Average:</b>	20	388	56.0%	47.6%

The number of casualties, per division, for the first half of 1944 are listed in Table 2.8, but the official history, Brigadier Molony's *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, notes that between January 18<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> inclusive, the start of the Garigliano Offensive, casualties in the whole of X Corps (which included 5<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup> & 56<sup>th</sup> Division) were 1,312.<sup>26</sup> Just three battalions of 5<sup>th</sup> Division lost about 565 men that week: The Royal Scots Fusiliers' casualties were approximately 140, including seven officers, to which a further 53 casualties had to be added on January 23<sup>rd</sup> – a total of 209.<sup>27</sup> The Field Returns of January 22<sup>nd</sup> for the 6<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlanders show a complement of 27 officers and 608 ORs, against a War Establishment of 36 officers and 815 ORs. The battalion was forced to reorganise into three Rifle Companies, so it must have lost in the region of 100 men.<sup>28</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn York & Lancaster lost 256 men during the week ending January 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>29</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn

<sup>24</sup> Casualty figures taken from Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 142

<sup>25</sup> War Establishment for September-October 1943 taken as 36 officers and 809 ORs. See, for instance, NA WO 169/10224 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Establishment 36 Officers and 809 ORs War Diary for October 1943: NA WO 169/10296 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters War Establishment of 36 officers and 809 ORs and NA WO 169/10216 16<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry War Establishment of 35 Officers and 809 ORs War Diary for October 1943

<sup>26</sup> J.C. Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, (London: HMSO, 1973), p. 620

<sup>27</sup> NA WO 170/1471 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Scots Fusiliers War Diary for January 1944

<sup>28</sup> NA WO 170/1474 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Seaforth Highlanders War Diary for January 1944

<sup>29</sup> NA WO 170/1490 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The York & Lancaster Regiment War Diary for January 1944

The Wiltshires, also from 5<sup>th</sup> Division, lost 195 men during the Garigliano operations (two weeks).<sup>30</sup> According to the 56<sup>th</sup> Division ADMS, divisional troop casualties for the week ending January 22<sup>nd</sup> were 40 officers and 659 ORs.<sup>31</sup> Eric Morris, in *Circles of Hell*, gives the figure of 4,000 British casualties in the first battle of Cassino (January 16<sup>th</sup>-February 13<sup>th</sup> 1944).<sup>32</sup> The 56<sup>th</sup> Division ADMS Medical Diary for January records 76 officer and 1,311 OR casualties in January - a total of 1,387.<sup>33</sup> Early on in the campaign, at the Battle of the Mignano Gap in front of Cassino, one company of the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Regiment, normally 120 men strong, could only muster one officer and eight men.<sup>34</sup> But casualties were never constant over time. Losses in British infantry divisions during the Second and Third Battles of Cassino, prior to May, for instance, were relatively light. In April, 4<sup>th</sup> Division casualties were 212.<sup>35</sup> The number of casualties rose dramatically yet again as the 4<sup>th</sup> Battle of Cassino (May 11<sup>th</sup>-June 4<sup>th</sup> 1944) unfolded. In just one month, May 11<sup>th</sup>-June 5<sup>th</sup>, the casualties in the 21 British battalions in Eighth Army amounted to 4,782: 1,068 killed, 3,506 wounded and 207 missing. The casualty rate amongst infantry companies was 31.6%.<sup>36</sup>

Casualties during the first week of the Anzio landing were unacceptably high in some of the battalions. The Irish Guards, for instance, suffered 89 casualties in the battle of Carroceto Factory on January 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> 1944, up to 20 of whom were killed. The battalion's padre, Father Brooke, described January 26<sup>th</sup> as "the worst day he had ever spent in this war

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<sup>30</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 632 Footnote

<sup>31</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary - ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division January 1944

<sup>32</sup> Morris, *Circles of Hell*, p. 270

<sup>33</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary - ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division January 1944

<sup>34</sup> Bowlby, *Countdown to Cassino*, p. 25

<sup>35</sup> NA WO 177/378 Medical Diary - ADMS 5<sup>th</sup> Division April, 1944

<sup>36</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, p. 469

or the last”.<sup>37</sup> In the same engagement the Grenadier Guards lost 29 officers and 579 ORs.<sup>38</sup> The beginning of February in the beachhead did not see any amelioration in the appalling casualty levels. The Germans began their counter-attack on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. In it the Duke of Wellington Regiment lost 260 officers and men; the Gordon Highlanders 320; and by February 4<sup>th</sup> the Irish Guards were reduced to 270 strong, “including the reserve that had come up from ‘B’ Ech. This number was re-enforced by a further 80 during the day made up of those had had found their way back to ‘B’ Echelon.”<sup>39</sup> Total casualties in the division were about 1,400.<sup>40</sup> At Anzio, “the two infantry battalions holding the wadis on the left sector of the [1<sup>st</sup>] divisional front were averaging twenty eight casualties each day”.<sup>41</sup> “Any battalion going to the Fortress would reckon on losing a third of its personnel within a week.”<sup>42</sup> It was on the beachhead the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Scots Guards sustained the heaviest casualties by any Scots’ Guards’ battalion during the war.<sup>43</sup> According to the official history of the Italian campaign, if it could be assumed that the British infantry battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade had gone into battle at Anzio at full war establishment, their effective strength on February 10<sup>th</sup>, expressed in percentages was:

**Figure 2.4**

<b>Percentage of 1<sup>st</sup> Division and 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade battalions’ strengths on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944<sup>44</sup></b>			
5 <sup>th</sup> Grenadier Guards	50%	2 <sup>nd</sup> Foresters	65%
1 <sup>st</sup> Scots Guards	55%	1 <sup>st</sup> KSLI	65%
1 <sup>st</sup> Irish Guards	60%	10 <sup>th</sup> Royal Berks	30%
2 <sup>nd</sup> North Staffs	55%	1 <sup>st</sup> London Scottish	40%
6 <sup>th</sup> Gordons	65%	1 <sup>st</sup> London Irish	40%
1 <sup>st</sup> D.W.R.	65%		

<sup>37</sup> NA WO 170/1354 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Irish Guards War Diary for January 1944 “The Battle of Carroceto Factory”.

<sup>38</sup> R. Trevelyan, *Rome ’44: The Battle for the Eternal City* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1981) p. 70

<sup>39</sup> NA WO 170/1354 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Irish Guards War Diary for February 1944

<sup>40</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 729

<sup>41</sup> A.M. Cheetam, *Ubique* (Formby, Lancs: Freshfield Books, 1987) p. 128

<sup>42</sup> Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, p. 217

<sup>43</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 84

<sup>44</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 735 footnote

Battle Casualty Statistics for the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division from January 23<sup>rd</sup>-June 6<sup>th</sup> (from the initial landing at Anzio to the fall of Rome) show that there were 369 officers killed or wounded during that period, and 5,408 ORs.<sup>45</sup> The total number of killed, wounded or missing was 470 officers and 8,868 ORs.<sup>46</sup> But the death rate, as one Guardsman pointed out, “was not as heavy as might have been expected in such difficult circumstances.”<sup>47</sup> The total number of men killed in 19 weeks was 92 officers and 993 ORs.<sup>48</sup>

Casualties during Operation OLIVE, the attack on the Gothic Line, which opened on August 25<sup>th</sup> 1944, were extremely high. In 26 days, during which Eighth Army advanced 30 miles, 14,000 men were killed, wounded or missing, and more than half the casualties were from the Infantry.<sup>49</sup> At Croce, two companies of the 8<sup>th</sup> Fusiliers suffered such withering German fire that one company was reduced to a strength of three men and the other could only count 20 still standing.<sup>50</sup> In just one week, the week beginning September 13<sup>th</sup>, Eighth Army lost an average of 750 men killed and wounded every day – roughly the equivalent of an entire infantry battalion daily.<sup>51</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> Bn DLI reported that from the time the battalion was committed on August 27<sup>th</sup> until September 28<sup>th</sup>, their casualties were as high as the total from Salerno to the Garigliano, a period of six months.<sup>52</sup> At the beginning of September the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens recorded that total casualties in just a few days’ fighting were “no less than 120”.<sup>53</sup> At the beginning of October it noted that “Bn now

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<sup>45</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 14/2 Battle Casualty Statistics, “The Anzio Beachhead”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, “Diary of a Guardsman”, Vol. 2, 153p.

<sup>48</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 14/2

<sup>49</sup> NA CAB 106/427 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, The Campaign in the Northern Apennines, p. 14

<sup>50</sup> Orgill, *The Gothic Line*, p. 105

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 131

<sup>52</sup> NA WO 170/1385 16<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry War Diary for September 1944

<sup>53</sup> NA WO 170/1466 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for September 1944

rather small in numbers.”<sup>54</sup> The 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queen’s also suffered severe casualties in September and at one point, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, could muster only 1 officer and 30 ORs in ‘D’ Coy, with ‘A’ & ‘C’ Coys down to about the same numbers.<sup>55</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn London Scottish lost 11 officers and 220 ORs in four days’ fighting.<sup>56</sup> The 56<sup>th</sup> Division suffered particularly heavily in September, with 176 Officer and 2,156 OR battle casualties.<sup>57</sup> Individual battalion casualty figures illustrate how grievous the losses could be:

**Figure 2.5**  
**Selected Gothic Line Casualty Figures**

<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Killed</u>		<u>Wounded</u>		<u>Missing</u>	
	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>
7 <sup>th</sup> Ox & Bucks*	1	21	7	78	3	14 <sup>58</sup>
7 <sup>th</sup> Ox & Bucks**	3	41	22	125	1	4 <sup>59</sup>
2/7 Queen’s***	1	18	5	64	-	8 <sup>60</sup>

\*Casualties suffered between September 1-8, 1944

\*\* Casualties suffered between September 13-20, 1944

\*\*\* Casualties in one day

The high casualty rates during Operation OLIVE gave the Germans a perfect opportunity to launch a propaganda leaflet headed “The Rifle Regiment Attack!” which read “Hundreds of dead and wounded are lying before our lines.”<sup>61</sup> As with all German propaganda leaflets, “The Fusiliers were unimpressed.”<sup>62</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers noted in their battalion diary earlier in the year that the troops regarded German propaganda leaflets “with humour”.<sup>63</sup> Another battalion noted that the shower of propaganda leaflets fired on their position was

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for September 1944

<sup>56</sup> NA WO 170/1435 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for September 1944

<sup>57</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division September 1944

<sup>58</sup> NA WO 170/1464 7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Regiment War Diary for September 1944

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for September 1944

<sup>61</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 203

<sup>62</sup> Northcote Parkinson, *Always A Fusilier*, p. 245

<sup>63</sup> NA WO 170/1389 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Fusiliers War Diary for March 1944

“an amusing diversion which helped to pass the morning, and the leaflets themselves came in very useful, as the Commanding Officer pointed out, for purposes other than those originally intended.”<sup>64</sup> Combat rations never had sufficient toilet paper.<sup>65</sup>

## II

Such high casualty rates in individual battalions during offensive operations were not only tragic on an individual level. They also destroyed the ability of the battalions to function efficiently. Without a solid core of battle-hardened men and officers who had trained and fought together, and who knew each other, the battalions lost their heart, and no amount of fresh blood, of reinforcements, could replace it. A key factor here was that the turn-over of personnel in any battalion included officers. *Comrades In Arms* emphasized that the right relationship between officers and men was the most important component for the morale of a unit. The men wanted “like most of us, the stimulus of a personal leader – someone whom they know and like to look up to, and admire.”<sup>66</sup> Even the temporary loss of officers, especially those who had gained the confidence of their men, would negatively influence the fighting spirit of their men. High officer and NCO casualty rates in particular meant that the command structure – the sergeants, sergeant majors and some experienced officers – could no longer instil a feeling of confidence among the men. Instead of able to say, “well, he was there, he was in France, he ought to know what he’s doing”, the worry was “he’s new, what does he know?”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> NA WO 170/1354 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Irish Guards War Diary for February 1944

<sup>65</sup> Morris, *Circles of Hell*, p. 284

<sup>66</sup> *Comrade in Arms*, pp. 1-2

<sup>67</sup> Conversation (August 2001) with Brigadier D.E. Ballantine of The Wiltshire Regiment, who served at Anzio



One officer recalled that by the end of January 1944, of the 36 or so fellow officers who had landed with him in Sicily, 14 had been killed and 16 wounded, some of them twice and “some so badly as never to return.”<sup>68</sup> “An infantry officer had only two options in World War Two”, wrote an officer who had a leg amputated in Italy, “death or being wounded. Virtually none survived intact in the front line through the North African campaign and Italy.”<sup>69</sup> A soldier from the Irish Brigade commented that when officers had the opportunity to celebrate:

..they certainly made the most of it, of course there would be a lot of empty places when they drank together again. We had a big turnover in officers, some joined us in line one night and went back wrapped in a blanket the next night.<sup>70</sup>

The loss of experienced officers was thus particularly detrimental to morale. The overall ratio of officer to OR casualty during the Italian campaign was 1:14.<sup>71</sup> In Sicily, however, a marked feature was the high proportion of officers killed to other ranks killed: “as high as 1 to 6 in some units; and averaging 1 to 9 in the whole army,” Montgomery wrote to Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, on July 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>72</sup> German snipers in Sicily were particularly accurate and seemed to have aimed specifically for officers’ heads.<sup>73</sup>

At Anzio there were some battalions which lost a proportionally high percentage of their officers: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Sherwood Foresters, for example, lost 100% of its men and 200% of its officers.<sup>74</sup> In January the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards reported that there were only 11 officers left in the battalion, “only five of whom were with Rifle Coys. 3 Coy had no officer left at

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<sup>68</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 179

<sup>69</sup> D. Forman, *To Reason Why* ((London: Andre Deutsch, 1991) p. 190

<sup>70</sup> IWM 999/85/1 K.R. Drury, “One Man’s Memories – Fifty Years On”, Behind the line celebrations

<sup>71</sup> Based on figures given in NA WO 170/4129 GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon, CMF War Diary for May 1945, Summary of Battle Casualties

<sup>72</sup> Brooks (ed.), *Montgomery*, p. 255

<sup>73</sup> LHCMA W/C 20/9 Major Munroe Sym, Part III, p. 18

all.”<sup>75</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn KSLI also suffered devastating officer losses: in an action at Buon Risposo Ridge on February 8<sup>th</sup> 1944 all officers in ‘B’ and ‘C’ Companies were either killed or wounded, two officers in ‘D’ Company were wounded and one officer in ‘C’ Company was missing. In addition, the Company Sergeant Majors of ‘A’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies were all wounded.<sup>76</sup> In other battalions a far smaller proportion of Officer losses to Other Ranks seems to have been the norm. To extrapolate from the admittedly small sampling offered by the 56<sup>th</sup> Division records, at a time when the fighting was particularly intense, the ratio of Officer/OR casualties at Anzio was lower than in Sicily.

**Table 2.6**

**Weekly 56<sup>th</sup> Div Casualties collected to Medical Units at Anzio Bridgehead only<sup>77</sup>**

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Ratio of Officers to OR casualties</u>
Week beginning February 19:	17	219	1:13
Week beginning February 26:	63	847	1:13
Week beginning March 4:	26	325	1:13

One reason for this was undoubtedly that in Sicily the British were advancing, and officers in the lead provided an easy target for the enemy. At Anzio everyone spent most of their time in trenches, so officers, while still leading their men, were less likely to be an obvious target, particularly for snipers. By this time, too, the wearing of tin hats, which had supposedly become compulsory from just after the landing, rendered it more difficult for the enemy to distinguish between officers and ORs.<sup>78</sup> After a month in the beachhead it became apparent that the incidence of head injuries among British troops from shrapnel in particular was four times as great as among the Americans, so the tin-hat rule was enforced with stiffer penalties:

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<sup>74</sup> D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, p. 300

<sup>75</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for January 1944

<sup>76</sup> NA WO 170/1416 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King’s Shropshire Light Infantry War Diary for February 1944

<sup>77</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diaries – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division February and March 1944

The Bde Comd directs that “tin-hats” will be carried at all times, and that it will be kept close at hand during the night so that it can be put on or over the face whilst lying down. Head injuries suffered where “tin hats” were NOT worn will in future be investigated by Coy Comds with a view to disciplinary action being taken.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, a large sign was erected on the coastal road, featuring Jane [a very popular *Daily Mirror* comic strip character] unclothed, but with a steel helmet. The sign said: ‘Wear your helmet at all times. Jane does’.<sup>80</sup> The sign eventually had to be taken down as it was provoking too many traffic accidents.

### III

As high as the casualty figures could climb during offensive operations, it was the steady attrition rate during defensive periods that was perhaps more demoralising. At least when battalions were pushing forward the men felt they were achieving something, and were sustained by an adrenalin rush, rather than sitting in trenches and suffering for no immediate tangible results. In March 1944 the 1st Bn East Surrey Regiment (78<sup>th</sup> Division) reported the loss of 52 men (one officer killed, one missing, and four wounded; 5 ORs killed, 31 wounded and 10 missing) in 28 days.<sup>81</sup> During the same period Fred Majdalany recorded the loss of over 70 officers and men in four and a half weeks in the mountains. “In any other arm of the service it would be considered a lot for a period of ‘doing nothing’.”<sup>82</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Lancashire Fusiliers, between March 26<sup>th</sup> and April 27<sup>th</sup>, lost 10 ORs killed, 5 officers and 37 ORs wounded and 4 ORs missing when they were in defensive positions in the mountains. The 5<sup>th</sup> Buffs, in the line at Cassino station in March,

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<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington Regiment War Diary for February 1944

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, Routine Orders

<sup>80</sup> J. Hillier, *The Long, Long Road to Victory*,: *War Diary of an Infantry Despatch Rider 1940-46* (Trowbridge, Wilts: privately published, 1995) p. 136

<sup>81</sup> NA WO 170/1482 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The East Surrey Regiment War Diary for March, 1944

<sup>82</sup> Majdalany, *Monastery*, p. 96

suffered the loss of one officer and 10 ORs killed and 36 ORs wounded in just eight days.<sup>83</sup> Sometimes the losses occurred in a far shorter time. In just ten minutes' shelling on the Castle at Cassino, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal West Kents lost 16 killed and 17 wounded.<sup>84</sup> A 4<sup>th</sup> Division soldier wrote about his spell in Cassino town in April:

The time we had spent so far in Cassino had, all of it, been in one of the 'quiet periods', in one of the 'lulls' between battles. Even so, we had lost quite a high proportion of our Company strength, a sobering thought for later days.<sup>85</sup>

Casualties among the Guards Brigade on Monte Battaglia (September-October 1944) ran to something like 10 a day from shelling, even when no attack was being made. "In the opinion of the Grenadiers, the misery of holding Monte Battaglia exceeded that endured even at Cassino."<sup>86</sup> Patrolling too, could result in high casualties: on the Sangro bridgehead the Royal West Kents of 78<sup>th</sup> Division lost more men in just 10 days' patrolling than any other battalion had in the main battle.<sup>87</sup> "One of the worst things of the lot, a patrol. You were on a hiding to nothing. Nobody liked the patrols," opined one corporal.<sup>88</sup> Patrolling could result in a slow but steady haemorrhaging of manpower, so most patrols avoided risks. "There was no advantage in sticking your neck out ... you went out 50 yards, not a hundred, because the Germans were 100 yards away."<sup>89</sup>

1945 opened with another static period, and although newspapers back in the UK reported that conditions were quiet, since no major operations took place, there was a good deal of small scale activity for the infantry, which continued defensive operations. There was a steady drain of battle casualties, amounting to about of third of the number incurred during

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<sup>83</sup> NA WO 170/1368 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diary for March, 1944

<sup>84</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for March, 1944

<sup>85</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, p. 97

<sup>86</sup> Blaxland, *Alexander's General*, p. 216

<sup>87</sup> Ford, *The Battleaxe Division*, p. 136

the December offensive.<sup>90</sup> 56<sup>th</sup> Division medical records show a steady drip of daily casualties in January ranging from 19 to nil, with the total number of casualties evacuated during the 31 days reaching 167. The total number of casualties for February was 292, with the majority of casualties incurred towards the end of the month (57 casualties evacuated on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 14 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and 28, 26 and 29 respectively evacuated during the final three days of the month).<sup>91</sup> Casualties for the final offensive, Operation GRAPESHOT, in the British units of Eighth Army from April 9<sup>th</sup>-May 2<sup>nd</sup> were 708 killed; 2,258 wounded and 102 missing.<sup>92</sup>

#### IV

The most common types of wounds in Italy were caused by high explosive, mortar and artillery fire. Infantrymen were thus the victims of violence meted out to them by an enemy they could not see, which made their plight even more stressful. One veteran of Anzio recalled:

We grew to distinguish the sound of various guns, as if they were voices – some were alto, some bass, some grumbly, some like baying wolves, some as retchy as the cough of a tubercular in his last stages. But all these were more or less noises off; nearer to hand were the staccato eugh-eugh of two-inch mortars, the snarly spandau-ripple, the more deliberate bren-crackle, and the swift searing whine past of a single bullet, generally tracer and half-seen like a miniature comet.<sup>93</sup>

In one battalion, the 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry (46<sup>th</sup> Division), between September 1943 to March 1944, there were 181 casualties from shelling (42% of total casualties); 63 casualties from gunshot, rifle and machine gun fire (34.8%); 26 casualties from mines (14.4%) and 16

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<sup>88</sup> IWM Sound Archives 17621 W. Virr, Reel 10

<sup>89</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16719 E. Grey, Reel 6

<sup>90</sup> NA CAB 106/441 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy 3 September 1943-2 May 1945 Part IV The Campaign in Lombardy, 1 April to 2 May 1945, p. 6

<sup>91</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diaries - ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division January and February 1945

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol VI, Part III, p. 334

<sup>93</sup> Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, p. 17

from hand grenades (8.8%).<sup>94</sup> During Operation OLIVE, in September 1944, about two thirds of injuries dealt with by Field Medical Units were due to shell or mortar fire.<sup>95</sup> Figures for 1945 show that casualties from shell and mortar fire far exceeded those from machine gun fire, bombs or mines.<sup>96</sup> Wounds to the upper and lower limbs formed the majority of cases treated. An indication of the distribution of wounds by anatomical region suffered by soldiers in Italy was provided by the XIII Corps figures for the second half of 1944 and the first quarter of 1945:

**Table 2.7**  
**XIII Corps Percentage Distribution of Wounds, by Anatomical Region<sup>97</sup>**

	<b>Aug-Sept 1944</b>	<b>Oct-Dec 1944</b>	<b>Jan-Mar 1945</b>
Head, Face, Neck	10.5	16.1	15.4
Chest	8.5	5.1	7.2
Upper Arm	5.7	6.4	8.5
Forearm and Hand	30.5	26.8	27.6
Abdomen	3.8	3.0	3.7
Back	2.8	2.2	3.1
Buttock	4.7	5.0	3.2
Thigh	12.4	17.1	13.5
Leg and Foot	20.9	17.8	18.5
Genitalia	0.9	0.5	0.3

The wounds most feared by soldiers were those to the abdomen, eyes, brain and genitals.<sup>98</sup> One Medical Officer, the CO of No. 7 CCS in Sicily, Colonel J.D.P. Macpherson, estimated that the mortality rate in cases of abdominal wounds in his CCS was 50%, and added that this was the experience of other CCS.<sup>99</sup> Abdominal wounds could be caused by shrapnel wounds to the buttocks, where the shrapnel passing upwards into the pelvis and damaged the lower bowel and bladder, resulting in peritonitis.<sup>100</sup> Wounds to the buttocks

<sup>94</sup> IWM 91/16/1 Captain H.M. Jones, *The Work of a Battalion Medical Officer*, p. 2

<sup>95</sup> NA WO 222/1495 *The Campaign in Italy – Medical*, p. 138

<sup>96</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, Table 56, p. 519

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, Table 54, p. 516

<sup>98</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 182

<sup>99</sup> Taylor, *Combat Nurse*, p. 141

<sup>100</sup> IWM 91/16/1 Captain H.M. Jones, *The Work of a Battalion Medical Officer*, pp. 2-3

were often received when the men were not properly dug-in. A battalion commander wrote in the battalion orders in July 1943:

I am always assured that there is no need to teach men to dig in as they will do that automatically.

Unfortunately it is not the case. Quite 75% of X Coy casualties on the 4<sup>th</sup> were avoidable. The Pl. which received the heaviest shelling had merely shallow scrapes to lie in. By the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> they had not improved them. Some men consider that they are well dug in when they are down 2ft 6ins. The net result of this is that most wounds are in the bottom or back as there is no room for that part in the holes.<sup>101</sup>

One infantryman remembered that the first thing one did when up front was to dig in.

The carving out of a shallow trench in the earth or rock to enable one to crouch below ground level meant the difference between being killed by enemy fire or staying alive. It was as simple as that. Only very rarely indeed did a slit trench ... get a direct hit.<sup>102</sup>

The importance of properly dug-in slit trenches was emphasised throughout the campaign.

When the 2/4 Hamps trained at the end of March 1944 they dug slit trenches of a "defence drill".<sup>103</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Buffs' diary noted on March 19<sup>th</sup> 1944 that the battalion was now at eight hours notice to move, "and modified training was carried out, and practice was given to the digging of slit trenches."<sup>104</sup> The CO of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> E. Surreys spoke to his battalion in September 1944 and stressed "the importance of digging in immediately when in a forward area in order to reduce the risk of unnecessary casualties."<sup>105</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents tried the humorous approach to encourage the appropriate preparation of trenches (see next page).

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<sup>101</sup> NA WO 169/10174 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders War Diary for July 1943 Battalion Orders, 1 July

<sup>102</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 95

<sup>103</sup> NA WO 170/1399 2/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for March 1944

<sup>104</sup> NA WO 170/1368 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diary for March 1944

<sup>105</sup> NA WO 170/1486 1/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The East Surrey Regiment War Diary for September 1944



Are you anxiously awaiting an Ideal Home at the end of the War? If so, you had better spend the time until then in studying better battle building. Only by this means can you ensure that you will be an applicant for a cosy house after the War.

First let us study the Battle Bed - sitting Room, or slit trench. First it must be safe. It should be sited on a soft foundation, and dug fast and deep.

A wide study of the safe - construction of this one room apartment shows that the more difficult and dangerous the situation, the higher the quality of the work - a great tribute to British workmanship.

So far so good, but, what about beauty? Do we want to disfigure the countryside by a building scheme which leaves behind it blots and scars of up-turned earth? Emphatically NO, and the Germans do not like

it either... They will show their displeasure by shooting most accurately at an ill-built housing estate.

Exterior decoration then is useful, as well as ornamental, in fact it is a life-saver for the tenants. At the moment, in our community, the standard is low.

As soon as the Bed - Sitting Room is complete it must be decorated, so that it fades into the surrounding country. Let our homes be neat but not "gorey". No matter how tired, camouflage your home before retiring to bed. He who sleeps first may never wake up.

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See overleaf for details of IDEAL HOME COMPETITION.



Despite the high percentage of casualties due to shelling, many men were more terrified of the threat posed by mines, because there was no warning before the first explosion. Italy became a giant mine field “and no weapon is uglier, for it waits in silence, small and secret, and it can kill any day, not only on the day of battle.”<sup>106</sup> Mine fields often accounted for more than one casualty: the first man to stand on one, and then his mate or the stretcher-bearer who would go in to rescue the first victim.<sup>107</sup> Corporal William Virr from the 16<sup>th</sup> DLI said:

Mines was one of the things I dreaded most – there were that many ingenious way of setting them up. ‘S’ mines especially, they were a shrapnel mine, you stood on that and it jumped about five feet in the air and then exploded with about 350 ball bearings inside. You’d really no chance, you stood on one of them and that was it. With a mine if you stood on it that was it – you’d lost your foot or lost your life.<sup>108</sup>

The mine known as ‘The De-bollocker’ was particularly loathed by infantrymen. It was a small pipe barrel about nine inches long with a bullet inside. The pipe was on a small platform which was put in the ground at an angle. “When you stood on it the bullet fired, up your leg – and that was why it was called the ‘De-bollocker’!”<sup>109</sup> In contrast, a small flesh wound could bring its own rewards. “To those in the know”, suggested an unwilling infantryman, “being flesh wounded, or even serious wounds were blessings in disguise. Flesh wounds got you out of the action usually for six to eight weeks, and could lead to downgrading and out of the infantry, and into a base job.”<sup>110</sup> A more severe wound, a ‘Blighty’ wound, would earn the injured man repatriation back to the UK. At the very least a wound meant a bed with sheets and an opportunity to rest. Captain Pat Mayhew, the 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> M. Gellhorn, *The Face of War* (London: Virago Press, 1986) p. 131

<sup>107</sup> Taylor, *Front-Line Nurse*, p. 76

<sup>108</sup> Hart, *The Heat of Battle*, p. 118

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> B. Mills, *One for Granddad! The Really, Really, Real Dad’s Army* (privately produced pamphlet, n.d.), p. 31

Northampton's intelligence officer, remembered clearly his first reactions when he was wounded:

Well, I'm not dead. Odd, I would have betted against my ever being hit. What's wrong with my arm? I can't feel it at all. Is it still there? (I felt with my right hand). Thank heaven, it moves around when I push it. I don't think I've even broken a bone; a flesh wound and something wrong with the nerve. I'm bound to get 48 hours rest for this – 48 hours of wonderful sleep.<sup>111</sup>

A wound could be counted on to get a soldier away from the fighting: "If you were never wounded, you didn't get out of the line."<sup>112</sup> A third wound rendered a soldier eligible for return to the UK. The 6<sup>th</sup> Royal West Kents sent their first man home on these grounds, one of the old members of the battalion, Sgt. Wilkins, in February 1944.<sup>113</sup>

## V

The speed and efficiency of the medical services attending to casualties was vital to the maintenance of morale. When men were wounded they wanted to know that they would be treated as quickly as possible to ensure the best possible chance of recovery. Generally, casualties in action were dealt with immediately by the medic and the stretcher bearers. The wounded were then ferried back to the Regimental Aid Post, which was located quite close to the action. Here a doctor gave instant treatment and decided upon the severity of the wound. Serious cases were passed back immediately to the Advance Dressing Station, where they could be operated on, and to the Casualty Clearing Station where their long-term care was decided upon. Recovery and convalescence was catered for in hospitals some distance from the front, sometimes in countries far away from the fighting.

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<sup>111</sup> IWM X (41).422 97/61 T.A. Buchanan, *The Fifth Battalion in North Africa and Sicily*, p. 29  
Recollections of Captain Pat Mayhew

<sup>112</sup> IWM Sound Archives 12436 R. Sherlow, Reel 9

<sup>113</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for February 1944

One Northampton infantryman remembered his experience at a CCS when he, and half his platoon, were injured in Sicily:

We were evacuated by the usual route of RAP, ADS and CCS. I was operated on at the CCS. The operating theatre was a barn with straw on the floor. It was lit by shadowless lamps powered by a generator. The surgeons all wore oilskin aprons well splattered with blood. Italian prisoners had been pressed into service as stretcher bearers, for the surgeons were operating on a conveyor belt system. There would be one wounded man being given knock out drops and pre-med, one man on the operating table being seen to and a third man, having been operated on having his wounds dressed.<sup>114</sup>

The ADS could be very rough and ready establishments. A wounded Grenadier Guard recalled his visit to one:

The ADS was just a stone hut with half a roof. A tarpaulin partly covered the entrance and kept some of the rain off the wounded who'd been left outside by the stretcher-bearers....

Inside the hut, the MO had a petrol fire going, boiling a pan of sooty water for sterilizing his instruments. His hands and face were as black as a coalminer's from the petrol smoke that hadn't escaped through the roof. When my turn came he gave me an injection and some sulfa tablets, tied a label to me and sent me off to the next ADS ..

As I staggered along I thanked my lucky stars that I wasn't a stretcher case. I wasn't relying on thirty relays of bearers to get me safely to the nearest ambulance, as those poor buggers lying out in the rain were.<sup>115</sup>

Unfortunately the topography of Italy mitigated against swift medical assistance for much of the time. Fighting in the mountains, where there were goat tracks rather than roads, seriously hampered medical efforts to get the injured down to an ADS. Where there were roads jeeps could be used, but more often than not the infantry were fighting in areas where roads were a luxury and casualties had to be hand-carried. The medical units were seriously handicapped by a shortage of personnel: casualties occurred among the fittest stretcher bearers, who operated in the forward areas, and the reinforcements received were

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<sup>114</sup> Ford, *Battleaxe Division*, p. 79

“physically of a very poor standard and ill-suited to the task of stretcher-bearing in the hills.”<sup>116</sup> Every possible avenue of additional manpower was utilised, including gunners from a Light Anti-Aircraft regiment, and at one time, on Monte Camino, there were 250 RAMC and 280 non-RAMC men, in addition to the regimental stretcher-bearers, employed.<sup>117</sup> In the winter of 1943/44, the terrain was so difficult that the interval between the time of wounding and surgical intervention sometimes extended to nearly 24 hours.<sup>118</sup> Although most casualties were treated more speedily, their journey down the mountains were often rough and ready and it was not unknown for casualties to be tipped off the stretchers.

The knock-on effect of fighting in mountains – both the additional, tiring portage duties which were often undertaken by infantrymen temporarily out of the line, and difficulties in evacuating the wounded – contributed to the general exhaustion and a lowering of morale.

Everything that could be brought up was brought up – two man bivvy’s [sic] – gloves – socks – rubber soled patrol boots – NAAFI over and above the daily ammunition and rations. Down the same route all casualties are evacuated. Every few hundred yards are stretcher bearer posts, and stretcher cases are handed on down this line from post to post. This is the only possible system, and it is well organised. But it means that a man, however badly wounded, has to wait 14-20 hours before he can get proper treatment .<sup>119</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Division Medical services admitted that this was not the ideal scenario for men who needed to know that medical assistance, if they were wounded, would be prompt. Prompt evacuation was a necessity to maintain morale, but: “Carriage was slow. Evacuation by night was often impossible. Intermittent shelling of the tracks added to the difficulties of

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<sup>115</sup> IWM 87/42/1 L. Waller, Saturday 12 February 1944

<sup>116</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 168

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 169

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 133

evacuation from forward RAPs ...the time interval between wounding and operation at this CCS was long.”<sup>120</sup> One injured officer from the 78<sup>th</sup> Division, whose leg was badly shattered by a smoke cannister, had to be lowered down the precipitous mountain side. After that, he said: “I have fleeting memories of a seemingly endless nightmare trip in a field ambulance with five other wounded men, all of us screaming for water, of which there was none.”<sup>121</sup> Many of the casualties, wounded in the mountain and brought down by mule and jeep were “in a very sorry state by the time nurses removed their field dressings and cleaned them up.”<sup>122</sup>

The evacuation of casualties was just as difficult over the winter of 1944/45. The 46<sup>th</sup> Division ADMS noted in December that:

Bad weather and bad roads cause extremely serious evacuation difficulties. All roads in Div area are closed from 0800-1400hrs and from 2000-0200hrs. Even during open periods there are frequent blocks. The rule is not relaxed for ambulance cases, consequently casualties are being held for long periods at the A.D.S., jeopardizing the lives of many. It is anticipated that priority cases will die.<sup>123</sup>

56<sup>th</sup> Division echoed the concern felt at the problems of evacuation:

ADMS ordered a check-up of number of deaths in A.D.P. and R.A.P.s of 169 Bde during this battle. The route of evacuation was so bad that cases were taking up to 14 hours and probably was the cause of the small number of abdominal cases reaching the F.D.S.<sup>124</sup>

The Guards Brigade was on Monte Battaglia in October, 1944. Its time there was, according to the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Brigade history:

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<sup>119</sup> NA WO 170/1347 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for February 1944 Appendix

<sup>120</sup> NA WO 177/378 Medical Diary – ADMS 4<sup>th</sup> Division March 1944

<sup>121</sup> Ford, *Battleaxe Division*, p. 156

<sup>122</sup> Taylor, *Front-Line Nurse*, p. 177

<sup>123</sup> NA WO 177/394 Medical Diary – ADMS 46<sup>th</sup> Division December 1944

<sup>124</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary – ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division December 1944

...the most unpleasant of any experienced by the Brigade since we held the Garigliano bridgehead last winter. In addition to the almost continuous enemy fire (which killed 12 men and wounded over 20 on the nights of the relief alone), our troops had to endure torrential rain-storms, which were quite unprecedented in that part of Italy.<sup>125</sup>

A causeway was the only possible approach to the Guards' positions, "A veritable knife-edge, so narrow that in places it was only possible to stand with feet astride upon it, registered by enemy mortars and swept by gales of driving rain. But the greatest enemy by far was the mud," wrote the Brigade historian. He continued:

As there was only one track, in use by 150 mules and 100 men night after night, its surface became a knee-deep glutinous morass, which only a month of unbroken sunshine would dry it. Once the surface had been liquified, a mule's spindly leg, digging deeply in with each step, was a sure way of making the quagmire almost bottomless.

It can well be imagined how difficult it was to evacuate casualties from the forward companies. We had 200 men from an Italian Pioneer Company, in addition to our own stretcher-bearers, strung out at 400 yard intervals along the causeway, but in spite of the limited distance which each stretcher party had to cover, a casualty would normally take three and a half hours for the three mile journey from the Castle to the ADS near Valmaggiore.<sup>126</sup>

In October 1944 the 1<sup>st</sup> Division ADMS had several general points to make about the evacuation of casualties from the mountains, particularly with reference to the use of mules:

The magic words "mule litters" often cause a false impression and lead individuals to think that they are the be-all and end-all for evacuation of casualties in mountain warfare. Their use is very strictly limited and in this formation they have been rather looked upon in the nature of an insurance.

There is no doubt that evacuation by this method is uncomfortable – far more uncomfortable than on a jeep with properly fitted stretcher gear.

They are as wide as a jeep and taking it on the whole – where a mule with two litters can go – so can a jeep. If muddy conditions make it impassable to a jeep – so more often than not does it do similarly for a laden mule.

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<sup>125</sup> NA WO 170/4404 Operations of 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Brigade in the Northern Apennines September 1944-February 1945, p.8

<sup>126</sup> Ibid

Down steep irregular and precipitous slopes the jolting progress of a mule makes it extremely uncomfortable, hazardous and terrifying to the casualties.

When casualties are large in number – carries are long – jeeps are unsuitable – and manpower in stretcher bearers is limited – then mules must be used. With few casualties there is no doubt whatsoever that hand carriage is infinitely superior in every way.<sup>127</sup>

Unfortunately hand carriage, especially at times when casualties were mounting up, meant bringing up “resting” battalions as porters and stretcher bearers, to release all the men of “active” battalions for battle. Over and above the potential for casualties among the “resting” battalions during their portage duties, they also had to contend with morale-sapping exhaustion.

The advances in medical treatment, especially the introduction of penicillin, undoubtedly cut mortality rates which might otherwise had equalled those of the First World War. Denis Forman, who had had his leg amputated at Cassino, wrote: “I was lucky ... that as septicaemia spread up my limb, I had access to plasma and penicillin. Penicillin was new. There was only enough for a few dozen cases, and as an officer of field rank I was one of those who got it. Other ranks died.”<sup>128</sup> An army nurse recalled: “We called it *gold dust* then. We could see it was going to alter the whole treatment of the wounded and save millions of lives...This first variety of penicillin was in powder form. Injections came later. It was placed in a ‘sterile gun’ and puffed into the wound. At first it was used sparingly, but later everyone had it. No more gas gangrene – the dread of the wounded.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> NA WO 177/375 Medical Diary – ADMS 1<sup>st</sup> Division October 1944 p. 5

<sup>128</sup> Forman, *To Reason Why*, p. 190

<sup>129</sup> Taylor, *Combat Nurse*, p. 182

Penicillin was one of the items which could be freely bought on the black market which flourished in Italy, but which were in short supply in the Army itself in the first half of 1944. Every sick civilian could go to a pharmacist and get a course of penicillin injections at a time when supplies in the military hospitals were about to run out. "At last the time has come when the effect of the black market on the war effort has become evident" recorded the man charged with investigating the penicillin racket in Naples in May of that year.<sup>130</sup> Penicillin did, however, become more readily available as the campaign continued.

## VI

It is extremely difficult to judge to what extent the casualty rate had a detrimental effect on morale. There are certain indicators to suggest that its influence was limited for at least the first half of the campaign. Firstly, despite the high casualty rates in specific battles, and the steady rate of attrition amongst infantrymen while maintaining the line, the number of self-inflicted wounds, used as a measure of low morale, does not point to degrading fighting spirit. On May 19<sup>th</sup> 1945, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon, CMF reported that since September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943, one officer and 49 ORs had been charged with having deliberately wounded themselves. It is almost certain that the official figures are an understatement of the real figure, but diary entries and oral records present a mixed picture of the extent of the problem. At Anzio, getting away from the beachhead was so important for some that they were driven to shooting themselves. Raleigh Trevelyan recalled how his wireless operator, on the way out on patrol, panicked and deliberately shot himself in the foot.<sup>131</sup> Other men would deliberately shoot off their trigger finger – a sign that they had been stretched too far.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Lewis, *Naples '44*, pp. 135-9

<sup>131</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, p. 279

<sup>132</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 215



One infantryman recalled how, on the way to Italy, “one man had died unaccountably on board from a bullet from his own rifle and another had shot himself in the foot.”<sup>133</sup> The same man wrote about another self-inflicted wound:

...A mobile canteen, manned by a kinswoman of General Sir Oliver Leese, had visited us. This was always a bad sign, well recognised by the men, for it had often meant in the past that we were soon to be in battle. Soon afterwards a sten gun stuttered and a man was found to have a self-inflicted wound in his mouth.<sup>134</sup>

Such men were probably diagnosed as “bomb happy” and seen by a psychiatrist. Not every case of self-inflicted injury, however, was driven by fatigue or shell shock:

A chap I shared a dug-out with said to me “It shall not be long before I’m in Blighty”. I told him perhaps it wouldn’t be long before we would all be there. Within forty eight hours he had shot himself in the foot. At first it was as though he felt no pain, but soon he was screaming and he was carted off to hospital. As I was the only witness I had to describe what happened. I said that he had his rifle cocked ready for action, the trigger caught in a twig and caused the rifle to shoot him. My story was accepted and the people at the enquiry expressed their sympathy to the “unfortunate” soldier who was dispatched to Blighty.<sup>135</sup>

There is no way of knowing how many cases of self-inflicted wounds were never reported.

Some, like the case above, were undoubtedly glossed over by fellow soldiers. One recalled that a friend

shot himself in the thigh. A lot of soldiers at that time were carrying lugers, picked up off the POWs, and the story goes, I didn’t see it happen, that he had it in his pocket and it inadvertently went off and, of course, being in his pocket in the first place it hits in his thigh, and a Luger carried a 9mm shell like a Sten gun, so it makes quite a hole. But of course the end product is that if you go away to a hospital and get sheets and blankets, something to be revered. I think he may have [done it deliberately] to be tactful.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> IWM 81/5/1 N.J. Friskney, Chapter 1, p. 8

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, Chapter 3, p. 3

<sup>135</sup> IWM 88/48/1 D.O. Helm, p. 68

<sup>136</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16573 T. Chadwick, Reel 5

Equally, units might have neglected to report such incidents for the sake of a battalion's reputation. One private in the 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry agreed that "there were cases of it," but acknowledged "it wasn't common."<sup>137</sup> John Renshaw, as a surgeon at Anzio, would have been in a good position to see the results of self-inflicted wounds, but he wrote that the only run of such wounds he saw in Italy were among Cypriot muleteers.<sup>138</sup>

Not all cases of self-inflicted wounds were brought about by fear. One soldier was so fed up one wet night, with an unending round of moving forward and starting to dig in, only to be ordered to move forward again, that he told his mates that if he had to move again, that was the last straw.

Well, we did get the order to move again, so he picked up the 2" Mortar, which has a spayed based plate on it, put his hand on a rock, gave it a wack and smashed his hand. Then the word came round, 'dig in, we're in the position we're going to be in', so we wouldn't have moved again anyway. He came back to the battalion, but his hand was one hell of a mess.<sup>139</sup>

A low incidence of self-inflicted wounds does not in itself, of course, indicate high morale, merely that few men were driven to the extreme of injuring themselves to avoid front line duty. Evidence from the Italian campaign would also seem to suggest that it is difficult to draw any firm conclusion about the morale of front-line troops from the number of casualties: the effect of the casualty rate on desertion was not straight-forward, certainly during the first half of the campaign. Diana Butler, an official war historian, drew up a list of weekly offences in British infantry divisions, including desertion and AWOL, set against the casualty rates during the first few months of 1944 in her study of British soldiers in

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<sup>137</sup> Private James Corr, 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry, in P. Hart, *Heat of Battle*, p. 165

<sup>138</sup> Renshaw, *Memoirs of An Army Surgeon*, p. 237

<sup>139</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16593 T. Chadwick, Reel 5

Italy. The ratio of desertions and AWOL to casualties for each division during operations periods has been extrapolated from the figures:

**Table 2.8**  
**Comparison of Divisional Weekly Offences with Battle Casualties Suffered**<sup>140</sup>  
**January-June, 1944**  
**(Taken from Summaries in CMG GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Ech WDs)**

**1<sup>ST</sup> DIVISION:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Desertion: &amp; AWOL</u>	<u>Battle Casualties (Weekly Total)</u>	<u>Ratio of Deserters/ AWOL to Casualties</u>
Jan 21-May 19	Anzio	236	7611	1:32
May 26-June 2	To Rome	38	342	1:9

**4<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Desertion: &amp; AWOL</u>	<u>Battle Casualties (Weekly Total)</u>	<u>Ratio of Deserters/ AWOL to Casualties</u>
Jan 21-Feb 11	-	4	0	4:0
Feb 18-March 24	Garigliano	28	66	1:2
March 31	-	5	17	1:3
April 7-April 21	North of Cassino	16	184	1:11
April 28-May 12	Cassino Town	16	187	1:11
May 19:	Assault	10	1628	1:163
May 26-June 2	-	25	272	1:11

**5<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Desertion: &amp; AWOL</u>	<u>Battle Casualties (Weekly Total)</u>	<u>Ratio of Deserters/ AWOL to Casualties</u>
Jan 7-Jan 14	Moving	12	45	1:4
Jan 21-March 3	Garigliano	98	2432	1:25
March 10-May 19	Anzio	317	1959	1:6
May 26-June 2	To Rome	22	948	1.43

**46<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Desertion: &amp; AWOL</u>	<u>Battle Casualties (Weekly Total)</u>	<u>Ratio of Deserters/ AWOL to Casualties</u>
Jan 7-Jan 14	-	15	399	1:27
Jan 21	Garigliano	2	23	1:12
Jan 28-Feb 4	Sujo Valley	25	342	1:14
Feb 11-March 3	Garigliano	72	889	1:12
March 10-April 21	-	51	3	17:1
Left Theatre				

<sup>140</sup> Extrapolated from figures given in NA CAB 101/224 "The British Soldier in Italy"

**56<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Desertion: &amp; AWOL</u>	<u>Battle Casualties (Weekly Total)</u>	<u>Ratio of Deserters/ AWOL to Casualties</u>
Jan 7-14	Coastal Sector	71	173	1:2
Jan 21-28	Garigliano	79	1120	1:14
Feb 4-March 10	Anzio	132	4167	1:32
March 17-April 21 Left Theatre	-	185	73	3:1

**78<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Desertion: &amp; AWOL</u>	<u>Battle Casualties (Weekly Total)</u>	<u>Ratio of Deserters/ AWOL to Casualties</u>
Jan 7-Feb 4	Mountain	81	25	3:1
Feb 11-March 17	Moving/Training	207	79	3:1
March 24-April 28	Rapido Valley	137	548	1:4
May 5-12	Leave/Training	65	-	-
May 19-June 2	Division Forward	87	964	1:11

From this it can be seen that a direct correlation between high casualty rates and desertion is tenuous. In Diana Butler's weekly totals, on which Table 2.8 is based, figures indicate that there were 10 absentees in 4<sup>th</sup> Division during the week ending May 19<sup>th</sup>, when casualties were 1,628. That was just two more absentees than the previous week, when there were just 21 casualties. In 5<sup>th</sup> Division there were 10 absentees set against 1,518 casualties for the week of January 28<sup>th</sup>, when the previous week there had been 48 absentees and 26 casualties. Among the more long-serving divisions there seems to be a greater correlation between high desertion rates and moving into battle. Men did not normally desert when they were in the front line. They deserted when they were ordered to go back to the front. As can be seen from Table 2.8, 56<sup>th</sup> Division's desertion/AWOL was highest just before the division left Cassino for Anzio and in 78<sup>th</sup> Division desertions were highest when it was training. 78<sup>th</sup> Division suffered from high desertion rates during the whole of the Italian campaign, yet their casualty rate was the lowest:

**Figure 2.9****Total Casualties, by Division, between September 9<sup>th</sup> 1943-November 30<sup>th</sup> 1944<sup>141</sup>**

<u>Division:</u>	<u>Total Casualties:</u>	
	<u>Officers:</u>	<u>ORs:</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Division	542	9654
46 <sup>th</sup> Division:	609	10055
56 <sup>th</sup> Division:	861	14827
78 <sup>th</sup> Division:	<u>367</u>	<u>6082</u>
<b>Average:</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>10,155</b>

A far more persuasive argument than a direct link between desertion and casualty rates in lowering morale is the correlation between the length of time in line/fighting experience and desertion. 78<sup>th</sup> Division, for instance, had been involved in “tricky hill fighting” in Tunisia and Sicily and was then in continuous contact with the enemy from the beginning of November 1943.<sup>142</sup> 56<sup>th</sup> Division was engaged in difficult fighting on M. Camino and the Garigliano assault, and was then moved, one brigade at a time, to Anzio. The time in line correlation breaks down with 4<sup>th</sup> Division, but:

The explanation may lie in the unhappy early history of the Division. After the cancellation of the Crotone assault it lost its Commander (General Hakwesworth) and was more or less used as an expendable force for plugging gaps and supplying unskilled labour; 1,500 infantrymen were ordered away as reinforcements, another 1,000 men were set to work in the docks. Its tank brigade was detached and when it was given a third brigade (28 Infantry) it was of only two battalions and had seen no active service, having spent all the war in Gibraltar.<sup>143</sup>

There is even evidence that morale could be at its peak when casualties were at their highest - at Anzio, in particular. There, by January 31<sup>st</sup> 1944 the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had suffered 2,100 casualties.<sup>144</sup> Amongst them was a large part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Sherwood Foresters,

<sup>141</sup> NA WO 106/3975 AFHQ, Mediterranean Joint Planning Staff ‘Operations of 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group’, 3 January 1945

<sup>142</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 37

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 38

<sup>144</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, pp. 676-7

which was reduced to just 258 all ranks.<sup>145</sup> The American General Harmon went to the Sherwood's position:

I had never seen so many dead men in one place. They lay so close together that I had to step with care. I shouted for the commanding officer. From a foxhole there arose a mud-covered sergeant with a handle-bar moustache. He was the highest ranking officer still alive. He stood stiffly to attention. "How's it going?" I asked. The answer was all round me. "Well, sir," the sergeant said, "there were a hundred and sixteen of us when we first came up, and there are sixteen of us left. We're ordered to hold out till sundown, and I think, with a little good fortune, we can manage to do so."<sup>146</sup>

On February 4<sup>th</sup> the King's Shropshire Light Infantry reported that "confidence pervaded the Bn" and that following orders that the ground which had been won was to be held at all costs, "the fighting went on all day and in no phase did the K.S.L.I. give ground."<sup>147</sup> Nor was there any feeling of defeatism among the front-line troops. All German formations referred to tough Allied resistance during their February offensive.<sup>148</sup> A Grenadier officer went round his platoons just before they were overrun in the German offensive of February 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>:

After telling one of the few old soldiers still left, a lance-corporal, that artillery support was coming and that a counter-attack was expected at any moment, the latter looked quizzically at his platoon commander. "Well, it's very nice of you to say that, Sir, but there ain't no — artillery, is there?" "No, I don't think there is, really," came the reply. "And there ain't no — counter-attack, is there, Sir?" "Well, probably not actually just yet," the platoon commander answered. "Oh ... well, Sir, it's very nice of you to speak to us. Don't worry, we'll go on sitting here," patting his bren gun as he spoke.<sup>149</sup>

One reason here may have been the circumscribed, concentrated nature of the beachhead where the misery was shared by all equally.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid

<sup>146</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, p. 77, and Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p.103

<sup>147</sup> NA WO 170/1416 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Shropshire Light Infantry War Diary for February 1944

<sup>148</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 746

<sup>149</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, pp. 145-6

## VII

Though there does not seem to have been an immediate link between the number of casualties and poor morale, high casualty rates undoubtedly had an influence on the bellicosity of front-line soldiers in two ways. Firstly, high casualties in individual battalions, particularly among officers, destroyed the organizational cohesion and leadership functions, to the detriment of morale. Secondly, the influence of casualties on morale had a cumulative effect over time. Most British soldiers were fighting not for King and Country but for their mates. Over time, the death or injury of mates and the continuing fear of being wounded themselves nibbled away at every soldier's thirst for battle, if, indeed, they had ever had it in the first place. The longer a division was in the line, the more casualties it suffered, the more they were forced to acknowledge their mortality, especially if the number of casualties in a single operation was particularly high. Alec Bowlby recalled that when his company moved up the Line on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1945, it was missing 11 deserters, mostly from 'C' Company, who were Tossignano survivors.<sup>150</sup> At Tossignano, during the night of December 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> 1944, part of the support barrage had fallen on 'C' Company, killing or wounding a whole platoon.<sup>151</sup>

Equally, men who had been wounded once became far more cautious with their own lives, less rash in battle. "There's nothing like a bullet wound or a shrapnel wound to knock the idea, once and for all, out of a man's head that he's somehow different, that mutilation, or death are rather more for others than for himself," wrote one survivor.<sup>152</sup> As time went by, men became less keen to put themselves in a position where they could become the next

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<sup>150</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 204

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 199

<sup>152</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.R. Framp, p. 128

statistic, particularly as they knew the war was coming to an end. One NCO recalled that “always at the back of your mind is the thought ‘Am I going to be killed.’”<sup>153</sup> In similar vein, an officer said: “Everyone I knew had been killed and it weighs on your mind that your time is coming.”<sup>154</sup> The longer the campaign dragged on, the greater the impact of casualties on morale.

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<sup>153</sup> IWM Sound Archives 10421 L. Thornton, Reel 21

<sup>154</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13878 R. Collins, Reel 11



### CHAPTER III

## THE MANPOWER CRISIS

Reinforcements were a vital component in buoying up the spirits of fighting men. “Men become tired of war, and armies which are always in action tire as well,” wrote John Baynes, in his seminal work *Morale*. He added: “The only way they avoid this process is by being replenished with new men. The unpleasant truth is that heavy losses lead to big reinforcements of fresh men.”<sup>1</sup> The speed with which the battalions were reinforced with an infusion of fresh young men who had not yet been wounded and who would, in principle, exhibit a keener fighting spirit, could be extremely beneficial to a unit’s morale.<sup>2</sup> The sad fact about the Italian campaign, however, is that there were no big reinforcements of fresh men. Even by the start of the Sicily campaign the British Army was in a parlous position with regard to reinforcements.<sup>3</sup> “Whatever criticisms may be made against them, the Allied Commanders in Italy cannot be accused of hoarding their capital for they never had any capital to hoard,” commented Eric Linklater.<sup>4</sup>

It is not true to say that there were no reinforcements; there were, but never enough. Before looking at what measures the Army introduced to try to ameliorate the situation, it is worthwhile examining the reinforcements situation to gauge the level of infantry manpower deprivations; then how the Army tackled the shortfall; and the resultant influence on morale.

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<sup>1</sup> Baynes, *Morale*, p. 101

<sup>2</sup> NA WO 222/1494 *The Campaign for Sicily*, p. 12

<sup>3</sup> NA WO 231/14 Operations in Sicily: Notes on the Campaign, Operation and Administrative Reports, 9 December 1943, Notes by Col. T.N. Grazebrook, 8

<sup>4</sup> Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy*, p. 159

## I

The reinforcements shortage was particularly acute in the Infantry: “... there was never enough infantry to go where the tanks could not, a reversion to the false doctrine that infantry was outdated, an anachronism, whose function had been usurped by the mechanised juggernauts of air and land, the aeroplane and the tank,” wrote one Italian campaign officer.<sup>5</sup> This view was echoed by the Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Division, when he noted “... infantry bns still short. ‘No rifle coys, no nothing’ – this simple truth has escaped emphasis the whole war.”<sup>6</sup> Sicily and Italy brought home one indisputable truth: Infantry was the decisive arm on the battlefield and mechanization was no substitute for manpower. Yet British commanders persisted in thinking of Armour as a decisive attacking arm.<sup>7</sup> To what extent the pre-war belief in Armour still affected infantry reinforcement levels by 1943 as against a general shortage of manpower after over four years of war is impossible to assess. Whatever the cause, the result was the same.

By the end of the Sicilian campaign in August 1943, 265 officer and 6,380 OR reinforcements had been sent to Sicily.<sup>8</sup> This was set against the total Eighth Army casualty figures for Sicily of 2,062 killed, 7,137 wounded and 2,643 missing in action.<sup>9</sup> This shortfall was to remain a permanent feature of the whole Italian campaign, and fell disproportionately heavily on infantry battalions. 5<sup>th</sup> Division had a fighting strength of 1,096 officers and 20,437 ORs on September 5<sup>th</sup>. By September 16<sup>th</sup> the figures had gone down to 894 and 17,348 respectively, and on October 10<sup>th</sup> there were 830 officers and

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<sup>5</sup> IWM 90/29/1 Captain J.B. Tomlinson, Vol. II, p. 128

<sup>6</sup> LHCMA, Penny Papers 8/33 Notes by Comd 1 Div, 21 April 1944

<sup>7</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 852

<sup>8</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Analysis of Inf Rfts supplied to or to be supplied to HUSKY by Mideast & BNAF, 18 August 1943

16,466 ORs. The Division received reinforcements and by the end of October there were 960 officers and 19,714 ORs. But by the end of the year the fighting strength had again been depleted, with a complement of only 782 officers and 16,173 ORs.<sup>10</sup> 78<sup>th</sup> Division seems to have fared slightly better before it arrived in Italy: on September 19<sup>th</sup> it was reinforced up to a fighting strength of 826 officers and 17,988 ORs (from 769 officers and 15,615 ORs on September 5<sup>th</sup>), but lost so many men in September that there were only 615 officers and 13,862 ORs left on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. One 78<sup>th</sup> Division battalion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers, was 201 men below strength (including sick and missing) on October 8<sup>th</sup>, and received two officer and 27 OR reinforcements on October 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>11</sup> 78<sup>th</sup> Division was reinforced to a level of 1,133 officers and 23,746 ORs at the beginning of November, only to go down to 783 officers and 16,987 men at the beginning of December. By the end of the year the Division's strength stood at 927 officers and 19,227 ORs.<sup>12</sup> Lack of reinforcements was one the reasons the Mt. Camino attack by X Corps was called off on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1943.<sup>13</sup> Between October 7<sup>th</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup> there were approximately 3,000 casualties in X Corps.<sup>14</sup> At Mt. Taborra the leading company of the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Queens was reduced to one officer and eight men (out of 120).<sup>15</sup> Of the 483 Grenadier Guards who went up Camino, only 263 returned.<sup>16</sup> General Clark informed Alexander that continuing the operation might so deplete the 56<sup>th</sup> Division "that it would be non-operational for a considerable period. This division was under strength at the start of the Italian campaign and its subsequent losses especially in officers and Non Commissioned Officers have been

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<sup>9</sup> S.E. Morison, *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984) p. 223

<sup>10</sup> NA WO 169/8521 'A' Branch, Main HQ, 8<sup>th</sup> Army War Diaries for September-December 1943

<sup>11</sup> NA WO 169/10251 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for October 1943

<sup>12</sup> NA WO 169/8521 'A' Branch, Main HQ, 8<sup>th</sup> Army War Diaries for September-December 1943

<sup>13</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 141

<sup>14</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 454

<sup>15</sup> Bowlby, *Countdown to Cassino*, p. 25

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70

heavy. It has been in action since September 9<sup>th</sup>. Supply of reinforcements has not equalled losses.”<sup>17</sup> One veteran has suggested that “had there been a fresh division behind the 56<sup>th</sup> on the Garigliano, the enemy might have been dislodged even without the threat to his communications” [the landing at Anzio].<sup>18</sup> Journalist Christopher Buckley also bemoaned the lack of manpower.

One cannot know all the circumstances which resulted in the bright promise of the spring and summer being dissipated in the winter shambles around Ortona and Cassino. What is abundantly clear is that when the hour of opportunity struck, the British and Americans did not possess the necessary forces with which to exploit it. The ‘tide in the affairs of men’ was upon them, but they failed to take it at the flood.<sup>19</sup>

There were no fresh divisions, nor enough men to reinforce the existing divisions. In January 1944, 5<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions received 219 reinforcements against a requirement of 4,686.<sup>20</sup> On February 18<sup>th</sup> 1944 three 1<sup>st</sup> Division battalions, the 6<sup>th</sup> Gordons, the 1<sup>st</sup> Loyals and the 2<sup>nd</sup> N. Staffs, were each over 300 ORs short. The other battalions in the Division were all short of between 150 and 300 men. Officer deficiencies ranged from six to 21 (the latter in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sherwood Foresters) and high officer deficiencies, as already noted, were detrimental to morale. There were no reinforcements en route from training depots or under orders at the Reinforcement Training Depots. In 5<sup>th</sup> Division deficiencies were less, although the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inniskillings recorded a shortage of 14 officers and 145 ORs. In 46<sup>th</sup> Division the battalions were short of anything from six officers and 15 men (6<sup>th</sup> York & Lancs) to 18 officers and 181 men (1/4<sup>th</sup> Hamps). Deficiencies in the 56<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Divisions were similar. The only reinforcements available in Italy the week ending February 18<sup>th</sup> 1944 were one officer and 92 ORs for the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens; nine ORs for the 2/7<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> NA WO 214/25 Alexander Papers: Italian Campaign – Progress of OPERATIONS BAYTOWN and AVALANCHE, 13 November 1943

<sup>18</sup> Northcote Parkinson, *Always A Fusilier*, p. 156

<sup>19</sup> Buckley, *The Road To Rome*, p. 187

Queens (56<sup>th</sup> Division) and four officers and 110 ORs for the Irish Brigade (78<sup>th</sup> Division).<sup>21</sup>

On May 12<sup>th</sup> there were no Infantry reinforcements either en route from Reinforcement Training Depots or under orders at Reinforcements Training Depots for any British Division.<sup>22</sup>

Before Anzio the 1<sup>st</sup> Division battalions were made up to full strength or almost full strength for the coming confrontation. The Irish Guards, whose War Establishment at the beginning of 1944 was 36 officers and 817 Other Ranks, had 36 officers and 820 ORs on January 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>23</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> North Staffordshires (2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade), whose War Establishment was 36 officers and 809 ORs, had 28 officers and 793 ORs.<sup>24</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Wellington's Battalion (War Establishment 36 officers and 809 ORs) landed 33 officers and 806 ORs.<sup>25</sup> The worst-off battalion in terms of manpower before Anzio was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters, whose War Establishment was 36 officers and 809 ORs but which could only muster 33 officers and 744 ORs on January 15<sup>th</sup> – totals which rose, however, to 38 officers and 792 ORs by January 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>26</sup> Soon after the landing losses reached around 50% of the battalions, but, when they were desperately needed, there were few reinforcements available. Anzio was supposed to relieve pressure on the Cassino front, but instead, battalions had to be shifted from Cassino to Anzio to bolster the depleted 1<sup>st</sup> Division. This was far from ideal. The reinforcements were exhausted, and exhausted men did not have high morale. 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade was normally part of 56<sup>th</sup> Division and had been fighting with the 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Garigliano Front up until January 26<sup>th</sup>. One of the

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<sup>20</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, pp. 602-3

<sup>21</sup> NA WO 170/41 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for February 1944

<sup>22</sup> NA WO 170/44 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for May-June 1944

<sup>23</sup> NA WO 170/1354 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Irish Guards War Diary for January 1944

<sup>24</sup> NA WO 170/1487 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The North Staffordshire Regiment War Diary for January 1944

Brigade's battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn London Irish Rifles, had been in the line there for 26 days without a break.<sup>27</sup> Another, the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Berkshires, had been part of the attacking force on Point 411 [a First Battle of Cassino objective] on January 24<sup>th</sup> and company strengths after that action were: 'A' – four officers and 48 ORs; 'B' – two officers and 38 ORs; 'C' – three officers and 38 ORs; and 'D' – just 37 ORs, when a company was usually composed of some 120 men.<sup>28</sup> In the last few days of January the three battalions received reinforcements: the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn London Scottish had an approximate strength of 729 men on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Berks arrived with 740 men, four of whom became casualties the first day.<sup>29</sup> Many of the newly-arrived men were soon to become casualties. By February 8<sup>th</sup> the Adjutant of the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Berks estimated the strength of the battalion to be 15 officers and 340 ORs, and on February 12<sup>th</sup> the battalion reorganised into one rifle company.<sup>30</sup>

On February 24<sup>th</sup> three fresh British battalions, the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, arrived at Azio to replace the exhausted and shattered Guards Brigade of 1<sup>st</sup> Division. The Guards, who could only be reinforced by guardsmen, had no more reinforcements available and were therefore a totally spent force. All five regiments of the Brigade of Guards in Italy were re-organised and re-grouped in February 1944 due to a shortage of reinforcement. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, following hard on the heels of 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Division landed to replace 56<sup>th</sup> Division. 5<sup>th</sup> Division had left the UK in March 1942 and having been stationed in India,

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<sup>25</sup> NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment War Diary for January 1944

<sup>26</sup> NA WO 170/1475 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters War Diary for January 1944

<sup>27</sup> NA WO 170/1432 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for January 1944

<sup>28</sup> NA WO 170/1365 10<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Berkshire Regiment War Diary for January 1944

<sup>29</sup> NA WO 170/1434 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for February 1944; NA WO 170/1365 10<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Berkshire Regiment War Diary for February 1944

<sup>30</sup> NA WO 170/1365 10<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Berkshire Regiment War Diary for February 1944

Persia, Iraq, Syria, and then Egypt, took part in the landing on Sicily and all subsequent operations in Italy.

The reinforcements for Anzio, therefore, such as they were, came in in dribs and drabs, after they were really needed, and always in insufficient numbers to do what was required. But by the time the battalions had broken out of the bridgehead and arrived in Rome, their strength was once again almost up to War Establishment.

**Figure 3.1**  
**Strength of British Infantry battalions pre- and post-Anzio<sup>31</sup>**

**1<sup>ST</sup> DIVISION:**

<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Strength on January 22th</u>		<u>Strength on June 10<sup>th</sup></u>	
	<b>Officers</b>	<b>ORs</b>	<b>Officers</b>	<b>ORs</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Bn North Staffs:	28	793	27	750
6 <sup>th</sup> Bn Gordon Highlanders:	32	785	34	762
1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Duke of Wellingtons:	33	806	34	764

**5<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION**

<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Strength on March 12<sup>th</sup></u>		<u>Strength on June 10th</u>	
	<b>Officers</b>	<b>ORs</b>	<b>Officers</b>	<b>ORs</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Bn York & Lancs:	38	700	29	703
2 <sup>nd</sup> Bn Northants:	27	691	35	743
6 <sup>th</sup> Bn Seaforth Highlanders:	32	629	28	717

So great was the shortage of reinforcements in infantry battalions by February 1944 that it was decided that they would not be reinforced beyond a battle strength of 26 officers and 700 ORs, although every effort would be made to maintain battalions at a high strength.<sup>32</sup> In March the expedient was officially adopted in the Mediterranean theatre of reducing the

<sup>31</sup> Figures taken from War Diaries NA WO 170/1487 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The North Staffordshire Regiment; NA WO 170/1394 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Gordon Highlanders; and NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment; NA WO 170/1490 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The York & Lancaster Regiment; NA WO 170/1445 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment; and NA WO 170/1474 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Seaforth Highlanders

<sup>32</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy August 1943-March 1944 Letter from the Chief of General Staff, 20 February 1944

establishments of infantry battalions from 844 all ranks to 726.<sup>33</sup> It was the drain on manpower that was to lay at the heart of all morale problems in the second half of 1944. The number of British reinforcements arriving in Italy, from January-December of that year, according to figures given in the extant Minutes of the DAG's Fortnightly Conferences, were:

**Figure 3.2**  
**No. of British reinforcements arriving in Italy in 1944<sup>34</sup>**

<u>Conference Date:</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>ORs</u>
January 11	371	8,135
February 8:	403	8,562
February 22:	270	998
March 9:	312	3,690
March 21:	235	3,747
April 4:	129	1,473
April 18:	557	11,128
May 2:	193	1,216
May 16:	175	791
June 13:	127	1,240
June 27:	228	1,407
August 15:	68	735
August 29:	141	1,181
September 12:	438	2,909
September 28:	145	1,664
October 5:	64	1,151
October 19:	351	2,131
November 2:	169	2,165
November 22:	268	873
December 5:	400	2,674
December 13:	<u>126</u>	<u>503</u>
<b>Totals (11 months):</b>	<b>5,170</b>	<b>58,373</b>

There are no records for the DAG Fortnightly Conferences in July, the month GHQ moved to Italy, but 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon records the following reinforcements "expected in theatre or arrived but not yet T.O.S." [Taken on Strength] during July. As can be seen from the percentages in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, very few were destined for the Infantry.

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<sup>33</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 423



**Figure 3.3****Percentage of Infantry Reinforcements from Total Arriving in Italy in July 1944<sup>35</sup>**

<u>Date:</u>	Total <u>Officers</u>	Total <u>ORs</u>	Infantry <u>Officers</u>	Infantry <u>ORs</u>	Percentage <u>Off</u> <u>ORs</u>	
July 10:	205	2,619	38	305	19%	12%
July 17:	504	5,227	95	394	19%	8%
July 31:	493	4,779	170	1,297	35%	27%

A lack of infantry replacements was evident later in the campaign as well:

**Figure 3.4****Reinforcements Arrived But Not Yet T.O.S. or Expected by the Following Dates<sup>36</sup>**

<u>Date:</u>	Total Rfts <u>Officers</u>	Total Rfts <u>ORs</u>	Infantry Rfts <u>Officers</u>	Infantry Rfts <u>ORs</u>	Infantry Percentage <u>Off</u> <u>ORs</u>	
<b>1944:</b>						
October 4:	289	2,693	30	369	10%	14%
December 16:	512	2,577	46	432	9%	17%
<b>1945:</b>						
February 10:	372	2,494	69	840	19%	34%
March 10:	283	1963	19	193	7%	10%

Battle casualties alone for the 16 months from September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943 to December 30<sup>th</sup> 1944 amounted to 5,747 officers and 80,247 ORs.<sup>37</sup> It might appear, therefore, on paper, that reinforcements were keeping up with casualties. However, as the figures for July, and later in the campaign, indicate, very few of these reinforcements were intended for the Infantry, where the real need lay.

<sup>34</sup> Figures taken from NA WO 170/1 G1(Br) AFHQ War Diary for January-March 1944 DAG Fortnightly Conferences

<sup>35</sup> NA WO 170/45 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for July 1944 Reinforcements Expected in Italy but Not Yet T.O.S. Appendix 'B' for 10 July, 17 July and 31 July 1944

<sup>36</sup> Figures taken from NA WO 170/49 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon, War Diary for October 1944 Reinforcements Statistics, Appendix H, 4 October; NA WO 170/51 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for December 1944 Reinforcement Statistics, Appendix H, 20 December; NA WO 170/4126 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for February 1945 Reinforcement Statistics, Appendix H, 14 February; NA WO 170/4127 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for March 1945 Reinforcement Statistics, Appendix H, 14 March

<sup>37</sup> NA WO 170/4125 CMF Allied Forces Italy GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for January 1945 Summary of Battle Casualties

## II

A major problem with regard to reinforcements was not just the quantity, but also the quality. Normally the infusion of fresh blood into a battalion was a morale-builder, bringing untried courage and enthusiasm into a group of war-weary men. The veterans, in their turn, would teach the newcomers the realities of front-line life. This was not the case at Anzio. Many experienced men were lost, although often temporarily, as wastage there exceeded estimates by more than 100%.<sup>38</sup> Not that this was a new phenomenon. In Sicily, Major Sym (2<sup>nd</sup> Seaforth Highlanders) noted that the marked preponderance of inexperienced troops over the veterans made him realise how extensively the Eighth Army had been reinforced throughout and after the North African campaign.<sup>39</sup> In November 1943 the X Corps Commander had noted that "In certain cases, reinforcements, particularly Medical and Infantry, are arriving in an unfit condition, and of low medical category."<sup>40</sup> There was an incident in 78<sup>th</sup> Division towards the end of 1944 when one platoon of the East Surreys refused to attack.<sup>41</sup> This battalion had only a small number of its seasoned veterans remaining.

At Anzio the veterans were replaced by "green" soldiers. According to the Deputy Assistant Director of Army Psychiatry, Anzio was not suitable for "green" recruits and the mismanagement of reinforcements had a damaging effect on individual and group morale.<sup>42</sup> There were no opportunities for men to get to know each other, and train together. This meant that there was no time to build up any esprit de corps, or indeed, in some cases, even

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<sup>38</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 423

<sup>39</sup> LHCMA W/C 20/9 Major Munroe Sym, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Seaforth Highlanders, Part III, p. 23

<sup>40</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy Memo from Commander X Corps to G1 (Br) AFHQ, 10 November 1943

<sup>41</sup> LHCMA (GB99KLCMA) General Sir Sidney Kirkman Letter, 23 December 1944

any small group cohesion, so essential for morale. A corporal in the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Shropshire Light Infantry (1<sup>st</sup> Division), noted in his diary that the first event of note at Anzio "was the arrival of reinforcements, our first since leaving Africa. They are all of them youngsters direct from Blighty. Poor devils, they do not realise what is ahead of them but will soon learn."<sup>43</sup> Some never got the chance. Often new drafts were sent to the front as soon as they arrived.<sup>44</sup> Several recruits from the Black Watch were sent to the Sherwood Foresters. "The officers arrived in the dark, we had to send them out on patrol that night because we had no one else to go out, and they were all killed in the night, and none of us saw them in daylight. It was tragic."<sup>45</sup> In another incident at the Fortress, a particularly dangerous position in the Anzio 'wadi' system: "All the recruits were completely raw and very young, with no battle experience. Less than a day after their arrival they had to be flung straight into the attack, with disastrous consequence."<sup>46</sup>

Throughout the Italian Campaign the 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry, at least, took a proactive approach, wherever possible, to try to avoid their new reinforcements becoming early casualties. "In my company we had a buddy boy system, where each chappie who came who had not been in battle before was turned over to one of the chaps who had been, to sort of help them through the early part, to show him the ropes, in other words, until he was able to stand on his own feet."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 214

<sup>43</sup> IWM PP/MCR/51 1944 Diary of Corporal R.H. Turner

<sup>44</sup> NA WO 170/1434 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for February 1944

<sup>45</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome 44*, p. 77

<sup>46</sup> Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, p. 153.

<sup>47</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13251 K.C. Lovell, Reel 13

At Cassino, as at Anzio, the life expectancy of the new, inexperienced men could be short.

A Cassino veteran recalled:

Very often these chaps had only been in the army for a matter of six weeks or so, and they were under the illusion that they were going to finish the war off in no time, just as we did when we first started...We would advise them what to do and what not to do, but it never seemed to work. I saw men come in and be dead after just a few days. We would tell them always to keep their heads down, but inevitably they would look up and get caught by snipers. The only way they seemed to learn was by seeing their comrades die – then they knew it was no game.<sup>48</sup>

### III

The problem with reinforcements in general was not just that they might not arrive when and where they were most needed. They might not even be trained up to standard. The 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers reported at the end of September 1943 that a minefield had not been laid owing to the inexperience of the patrol which had been sent to the battalion as trained infantry reinforcements.<sup>49</sup> Lt-General Kirkman, Commander XIII Corps, noted in his diary that he:

Visited Gen Hayman Joyce [commander 4<sup>th</sup> Division until 20 April] at his request. He is unhappy about his 28 Inf. Bde. Scott the new Brig who replaced Purvis [on 12 April] says that they are untrained and jumpy. Difficulty is that Hayman Joyce has planned to attack with them & owing to other reliefs a change is exceedingly difficult now.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, however rapidly reinforcements arrive, they could not restore a battalion to its previous efficiency without a period for rest and training during which its newcomers could be absorbed into and identified with their fighting-teams.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Matthew Salmon, 56<sup>th</sup> Division, quoted in M. Parker, *Monte Cassino* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2003) p. 33

<sup>49</sup> NA WO 169/10214 9<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Fusiliers. War Diary for September 1943

<sup>50</sup> LHCMA, Kirkman Manuscript, Diary Entry, 18 April 1944

<sup>51</sup> Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy*, p. 135.

The arrival of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Brigade and 4<sup>th</sup> Division in the Cassino area in February 1944, to replace 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions on that front, did not mean that the British had sufficient manpower to be able to withdraw exhausted divisions from the front line and replace them with impunity. They were robbing Peter (in this case the Middle East) to pay Paul. Neither newly-arrived formation was trained and ready for the conditions they would face. Ten days before climbing up Monte Ornito, the Welsh Guards had been training as lorried infantry to 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.

To be suddenly thrown into some of the hardest hill fighting yet encountered in World War II as an ordinary Infantry Brigade meant that there was a great many alterations to our way of thinking that could only be learnt the hard way.

The conditions were far tougher than anything we had known. The marching and climbing up the Italian hills was something a Battalion used to TCVs found hard to accustom itself ...

The type of fighting in the mountains was something quite new to us. To build a 'sangar' of stones, rather than dig out traditional slit trench came as a surprise, and I think the lack of knowledge of this kind as self defence cost us considerable casualties. Neither had we ever encountered the enemy at such close range.<sup>52</sup>

4<sup>th</sup> Division was also ill-prepared. Most of the Division had last fought in Tunis (May 5<sup>th</sup> –12<sup>th</sup>, 1943) and had then remained in the Middle East. The 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshires joined the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in March 1944. It had previously served as a Beach Group for the Salerno Landings and had remained there until March. General Leese wrote to Major-General Kennedy at the War Office:

4<sup>th</sup> British Division arrived in a very low state of training. As a result of this I talked to John Harding and we have just had Ronnie Scobie over here in order to discuss the training of formations in the Middle East. He was very receptive to new ideas and we arranged for officers of his staff, etc., to come over at frequent intervals. 28 Bde in particular ... which contains two regular battalions from Gibraltar, knew absolutely nothing about infantry-cum-tank tactics. I have put in a new Brigadier, Andrew Scott of the Irish Guards, and I

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<sup>52</sup> NA WO 170/1347 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for February 1944 Appendix

hope they will quickly learn battle technique. Hayman-Jones, who commands the Division, is a solid stick with no battle experience. When he gets this I hope he will be alright.<sup>53</sup>

#### IV

A particularly acute problem was the shortage of infantry officers: good officers were vital to the maintenance of morale, yet the shortage of officers was acute. Repeated requests were made for more infantry officers but it appears that BNAF made no provisions for officer reinforcements to meet Eighth Army's repeated demands and warning.<sup>54</sup> As early as August 17<sup>th</sup> 1943 it had been recognised that there was a deficiency in infantry officers in North Africa and Sicily and that the full scale of such officers could not be provided among reinforcements scheduled for Italy in September.<sup>55</sup> In some Eighth Army battalions, before the River Trigno battle at the beginning of November 1943, the number of officers present was as few as 17, with no replacements available.<sup>56</sup> There were therefore practically no officers available to command platoons in these battalions. The 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Sherwood Foresters reported that during the first week of January 1944 they had just seven subalterns out of a War Establishment of 19.<sup>57</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Royal West Kents recorded in March that "the question and problem of offr reinforcements still being an acute one the A/Adjt, Capt T.R. Hartland went to No. 1 IRTD to try to collect 2 offrs reinforcements. He returned with Lt. J.R. Oxenham ex RAC he being the only offr at the IRTD available for posting."<sup>58</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon was forced to request the return of 116 Infantry officers to regimental employment who were then serving with A(1) list units.<sup>59</sup> The problem seems to have been that the

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<sup>53</sup> NA WO 216/168 Leese Papers, Letter, 16 April 1944

<sup>54</sup> NA WO 169/8521 'A' Branch, Main HQ, 8<sup>th</sup> Army War Diary for November 1943

<sup>55</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy Memorandum HQ 15 Army Group, 17 August 1943, p. 1

<sup>56</sup> NA WO 214/25 Alexander Papers: Italian Campaign – Progress of OPERATIONS BAYTOWN and AVALANCHE, 3 November 1943

<sup>57</sup> NA WO 170/1476 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters War Diary for January 1944

<sup>58</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for March 1944

<sup>59</sup> NA WO 170/40 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for January 1944

proportion of officers to OR casualties was taken by AFHQ to be 1 to 20, whereas the ratio was 1 to 10.<sup>60</sup>

The Infantry Rifle Officer shortage on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1943 amounted to 179 in Eighth Army and 261 in X Corps.<sup>61</sup> South African officers were brought in to fill the void.<sup>62</sup> It is worth noting that by the end of the campaign the majority of officer reinforcements were not British. Of the officer allotment of reinforcements disembarked in Italy during the fortnight ending April 4<sup>th</sup> 1945, 11 were British Army and 138 were listed as 'Other Nationalities'.<sup>63</sup>

The impact of replacement officers in influencing morale could be either beneficial or detrimental. When a temporary CO was attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wiltshires the men "found it hard at times to understand his accent and to act quickly to his order. So we became jumpy."<sup>64</sup> After a short while they got another CO. "This CO was strict, a very fair man; he gave credit where it was due, and men could feel he knew the way to fight a war, and this was good for morale. We were a First Class Fighting Battalion ready for anyone, and proud of it."<sup>65</sup>

Administration could also have been better: Major P.J.D. Johnson, a DMT Observer who submitted a report on "Lessons from HUSKY", made the point that "reinforcements are too little and too late. Officers and men are kept hanging about in transit and reinforcements

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<sup>60</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy Letter from Major-General Sir Brian H. Robertson, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, AFHQ, Adv.Adm. Ech, CMF to Lt.-General Sir Humfrey M. Gale, Chief Administrative Officer, Allied Force HQ, 1 November 1943

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> NA WO 169/10271 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment. War Diary for December 1943

<sup>63</sup> WO 170/1428 G1(Br) AFHQ Diary for April 1945

<sup>64</sup> Hillier, *The Long Long Road to Victory*, p. 110

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

camps, while forward units are crying out for them.”<sup>66</sup> In November 1943 Major-General Hawkesworth, Commander 46<sup>th</sup> Division, asked X Corps if officer reinforcements could be sent to the Division in bulk to allow the Division to do the posting. His reasons were:

1. I know the requirements of each unit and its state of efficiency – and it materially helps a backward unit to have some of the better officers posted to it.
2. I am able usually to ensure that specialist officers go where they are most needed – and this includes not only recognised specialists such as anti tank or signals officers, but also others such as officers capable of training snipers or officers suitable for pioneer platoons.
3. The posting of officers should not be merely on a numerical basis. The capacity of a unit to absorb and train officers, and the numbers and state of efficiency of the NCOs in a unit have a direct bearing on the case. A unit which is weak in NCOs needs considerably more officers than one with good NCOs which can manage with considerably fewer officers.
4. I have found that this method of posting officers has had most beneficial effects on the officers themselves and on units. Reinforcement officers feel that a human interest is taken in them from the start and units feel that their requirements really are studied.<sup>67</sup>

The Corps Commander was sympathetic to the Divisional Commanders’ wish to post their own reinforcement officers. “This desire actually only arises at times when there is a shortage – it is a matter of making the very best possible use of limited resources – and in the Corps Commander’s view such circumstances require special treatment.”<sup>68</sup>

The loss of officers in the first four months in Italy meant that every avenue of increasing their numbers was exploited. An Officer Cadet Training Unit Board was established in Naples and potential officers were sent there for selection.<sup>69</sup> By December 19<sup>th</sup> 1944 there

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<sup>66</sup> NA WO 204/7543 Lessons from “HUSKY” General Points

<sup>67</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy Letter from Major-General J. Hawkesworth to 10 Corps, 18 November 1943

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, Letter from Brigadier G. Lucas, Rear Headquarters, 10 Corps, to Colonel W.G. Piddsley, AAG, AFGQ, 22 November 1943

<sup>69</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for February 1944



were 923 successful OCTU candidates for the infantry in Italy, and 1655 in other arms.<sup>70</sup> Between January 1<sup>st</sup> 1943 and December 19<sup>th</sup> 1944, there were 197 infantry commissions granted.<sup>71</sup> It was possible for an able man to rise to the top of his profession in this way – John Kerr rose from being Company Sergeant Major to CO of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in 18 months.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, many men with leadership potential chose not to rise up the ranks after surveying the casualty rates among officers and NCOs. A junior officer in Italy felt that one of the main problems was getting people to accept promotion. “There just weren’t sufficient men of adequate leadership calibre available and most were very reluctant to accept the extra responsibility.”<sup>73</sup>

## V

Faced with a manpower crisis, and with so few infantry reinforcements forthcoming, the Army looked round for alternative sources of front-line soldiers. They came from three sources:

1. Infantrymen who were already in Italy, in non-combatant units
2. Under-employed units, such as the anti-aircraft artillery, or depleted infantry battalions, which were disbanded and their men used as front-line reinforcements
3. From among the ex-hospital infantry

Firstly, in the summer of 1944, the misuse and unauthorised employment of army personnel, either by way of attachments surplus to establishments or unauthorised formation of units, was tightened up. “This mis-use of personnel is, directly or indirectly, at the expense of reinforcements required to replace wastage in fighting formations, and it is felt that the acute manpower situation cannot be appreciated by those responsible for their mis-use.” The writer continued:

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<sup>70</sup> NA WO 170/5 G1 (Br) AFHQ War Diary for December 1944 DAG Conference Minutes, 19 December 1944

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Appendix A

<sup>72</sup> NA WO 204/10425 “The Irish Brigade in Italy”, Part I, p. 35

It is frequently found particularly in the case of some standard WEs, that under particular circumstances certain personnel are not fully employed. This is particularly the case in base and L of C units where by adjustment of work within the unit under static conditions and by making full use of the employment of civilians, tradesmen can be released to make up deficiencies in forward units where they are so badly needed.

It is the duty of every commanding officer to keep under review the WE of his unit in relation to its task and make every effort to effect economies by releasing personnel held on WE who are not fully employed.<sup>74</sup>

The use of civilian replacements in the rear was somewhat contentious. The Major General Commanding HQ 2 District pointed out in a letter to HQ, AAI, that unless the British personnel were replaced by Italian Military who could be ordered to accompany the HQs or units, irrespective of destination, there was a considerable risk of their mobility being affected, "since civilians recruited locally are not likely to volunteer to leave their homes for service elsewhere." Further objections hinged on the fear that there would be administrative breakdowns due to absenteeism on Sundays and Saints' Days and because civilian staff might not be available to work on demand throughout a full 24-hour day. There were also concerns over language difficulties. In general it was deemed preferable for replacement labour to be drawn from the Italian Military rather than civilians.<sup>75</sup> The upshot was that it was finally decided that the maximum dilution of units with Italian Military and civilian personnel had to be undertaken "compatible with efficiency, even at the expense of inconvenience in administration."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Anon., "The Desertion Crisis in Italy", pp. 84-87

<sup>74</sup> NA WO 204/6615 Manpower – Planning, etc. February 1944-June 1945 Letter from the Major General, Chief Administrative Officer, HQ Allied Armies in Italy, 26 July 1944, to Eighth Army, HQ 5 Corps, HQs 1,2 & 3 Districts

<sup>75</sup> NA WO 204/7690 Manpower, May-June 1944 Letter from Major General Commanding HQ 2 District CMF to G (SD) HQ AAI, 22 June 1944

<sup>76</sup> NA WO 204/6615 Manpower - Planning etc., February 1944-June 1945 Letter from Major General Chief Administrative Officer, HQ AAI, dated 26 July 1944

Copp & McAndrew noted that in the Canadian Army some officers got rid of disruptive or unsuitable soldiers by posting them to front-line infantry units.<sup>77</sup> Such soldiers were not the most suitable to be sent to an operational theatre of war, and there is reason to suspect that the experience of the British Army was similar. One infantryman remembers that reinforcements were “the dregs of all the reinforcement camps in North Africa.”<sup>78</sup>

Secondly, it was decided to convert and retrain large numbers of Officers and ORs from other arms of the service which were no longer so important to the conduct of the war, particularly AA Regiments which could be disbanded due to the complete Allies’ air superiority.<sup>79</sup> The total number of personnel made available to other arms by AA disbandment and dilutions was roughly 29,700 by the end of 1944.<sup>80</sup> But in time this expedient was to cause morale problems.<sup>81</sup>

One AA-turned-Infantry subaltern started out as a gunner manning a ‘Z’ rocket battery in Liverpool. But once Liverpool was no longer threatened by the Luftwaffe he, and over a thousand other gunnery officers like him, spent two months of 1943 “learning the art of infantry warfare.”<sup>82</sup>

We had all served as young subalterns in A.A. command and had spent the previous two months at Dunbar in Scotland on the Lammermuir hills preparing for the change over to infantry regiments. There was sound reason for such a redeployment of about a thousand young officers, but the process was initiated by the War Office with sad ineptitude. Men, often from pre-war Territorial Army units, were sent with little notice and no reason given to retrain. There

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<sup>77</sup> Copp & McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, p. 60

<sup>78</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16719 E. Grey, Reel 6

<sup>79</sup> NA CAB 106/451 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 4, Notes on AA Disbandment and the Conversion of Personnel of other Arms to Infantry, p. 10

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10

<sup>81</sup> Doherty, *A Noble Crusade*, p. 226

<sup>82</sup> IWM 81/5/1 N.J. Friskney Chapter 1, p. 2

were ugly rumours of discontent. In January 1944 the Adjutant General was sent from London to Dunbar to address the first draft of 500 young officers. The whole Officers' Training Unit convened in a local cinema and His Majesty's Adjutant General was shouted down. The matter never reached the press – for it was war time – but things could have been better handled. Things settled down after a while and with weekend leave possible at the Officers Club in Queen Street, Edinburgh, morale improved.<sup>83</sup>

Many of the former AA Personnel were unhappy at being transferred to the Infantry. "The end of November was a truly sad time for me... I found that I was transferred with others to IRTD, which was in effect a unit giving infantry training. None of us took too kindly to the training."<sup>84</sup> Soldiers never had a good word to say about the IRTDs:

God, how we hated those places and the staff who ran them – most, if not all of whom, we were sure, had never, themselves, either fired or seen a shot fired in anger. The bullshit commenced immediately you arrived at the place, you were put on charges for the least little infringement of the rules. The saluting drills, foot drills, arms drills, P.T., white-washing, blancoing, polishing were endless.<sup>85</sup>

In fact, the IRTD in Italy was not initially geared to provide basic infantry training which would normally be carried out in the UK so a new training battalion, seven companies strong, was established at the IRTD to carry out the infantry conversion training. Each company was to handle 300 men, retraining them over a three month period. The new training battalion required instructors, who had to be withdrawn from units, and were therefore not able to start their training tasks until mid-June, 1944, "which meant that no relief would be felt in the reinforcement field before mid-September. Pressure described as 'urgent operational reasons' forced a reduction of the syllabus to two months in the middle of the first course."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>84</sup> Lee Harvey, *D-Day Dodger*, p. 156

<sup>85</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, Chapter 15, p. 117

<sup>86</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 448-9

Light Anti-Aircraft men “took the infantry very hard,” wrote one infantryman.<sup>87</sup> A platoon commander recalled: “There were a number of arrivals who showed a lack of guts from the time of their arrival in the platoon”.<sup>88</sup> The British History Section, in its Monograph on Desertion, stated that the root cause of the desertion problem was undoubtedly the quality of the available infantry reinforcement:

In the latter stages of the campaign infantry reinforcements had to be found by the conversion of units from other arms rendered surplus by disbandment. While a number of these men rendered excellent service a proportion were undoubtedly disgruntled, or for other reasons felt out of their depth.

A case in point is that of the divisional Light Anti-Aircraft units who were frequently employed in the latter stages, owing to the eclipse of the German Airforce, as infantry or sappers and on mine clearance, with great success when operating as units. On the other hand, when the units were broken up and the men posted, after a short and sometimes perfunctory training, as individual infantry reinforcements, it was not surprising that many of them showed no inclination for the work and became a definite source of discontent in their new units.<sup>89</sup>

The Psychiatric team of XIII Corps noted in the last quarter of 1944 that they came across a “small but constant number of cases where factors other than battle stress were prominent. Some cases of soldiers recently transferred to the infantry from other arms such as RA might be included here. Many of these, although having records of good service in their original units, might be termed inadequate for the role of infantrymen.”<sup>90</sup>

46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions were the first divisions to be brought up to strength with former AA personnel when they were taken out of the line in March, 1944.<sup>91</sup> The divisions returned to

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<sup>87</sup> IWM 74/118/1 S.C. Loveday, p. 51

<sup>88</sup> Anon., “The Desertion Crisis in Italy”, p. 84-87

<sup>89</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 3

<sup>90</sup> NA WO 222/1455 Medical Quarterly Reports No. 13 Corps Psychiatric Team, July 44-July 45

<sup>91</sup> NA CAB 106/451 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 4, Notes on AA Disbandment and the Conversion of Personnel of Other Arms to Infantry, p. 10

Italy at the beginning of July, as 5<sup>th</sup> Division left for Palestine. 5<sup>th</sup> Division would not be back in Italy until February 1945. 78<sup>th</sup> Division had been “hard at it for 18 months.”<sup>92</sup> It was withdrawn to Egypt in July for rest and re-training and returned in September, by which time it was the only relatively “fresh” division on the battlefield.

Another expedient that the War Office adopted to “stretch” its manpower resources, despite the fact that British doctrine insisted that one of the foundations of high morale was strong esprit de corps, was to disband some battalions and use their men to reinforce others. For some men changing regiments was not a problem. The Northamptons (78<sup>th</sup> Division) War Diary pointed out that:

During recent actions, men who have joined from other units came through the ordeals extremely well and have shown themselves to be keen and enthusiastic soldiers. One notable instance was when a former member of the East Yorkshire Regiment was asked what regiment he belonged to – he promptly and proudly replied – THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE REGIMENT OF COURSE.<sup>93</sup>

And a medical officer pointed out that: “Esprit de Corps grows up no matter how it may be checked by frequent changes of personnel, and the unit one is with is the best unit at that time.”<sup>94</sup>

But for other men the expedient of disbandment and cross-posting in Italy was very hard on morale. Men in the soon-to-be-disbanded battalions had fought together and developed their own traditions and unit cohesion which were now going to be destroyed, not by the

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<sup>92</sup> NA WO 204/10205 Distribution of Troops Build-Up in Italian Campaign, February-July 44 Message from CIGS to General Wilson, 7 July 1944

<sup>93</sup> NA WO 169/10271 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment. War Diary for November 1943

<sup>94</sup> Renshaw, *Memoirs of An Army Surgeon*, p. 179

enemy, but by their superiors. Divisional commanders were well aware of this. In a confidential report from Anzio the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Commander noted that:

Another difficulty is our present chaotic system of reinforcement and the resultant “dog’s breakfast” in units. Whatever views may be held on the regimental system, it has got a grip and the majority of men serve better in their own regiment and amongst their friends.<sup>95</sup>

Needs must, however, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers was disbanded in July 1944 owing to the lack of Irish reinforcements. Its place in the Irish Brigade was taken by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Inniskillings, which was transferred from 5<sup>th</sup> Division. The 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings were promised that as many personnel as possible would be absorbed into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inniskillings, and others would go to the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> London Irish Rifles, thus keeping as many of them as possible in the Brigade. “The Bn received the news with mixed feelings, none of them pleasant, for the men of the Bn had done a lot of good work together and had played a leading part in building up the reputation of the ‘Irish Bde’.”<sup>96</sup> In September 1944 it was decided to reduce 168<sup>th</sup> Brigade (56<sup>th</sup> Division) and 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade (1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division) to cadre. 168<sup>th</sup> Bde (1<sup>st</sup> London Scots, 1<sup>st</sup> London Irish Rifles and 1<sup>st</sup> Welch Regiment) was amalgamated with 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade (8<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers, 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers and 7<sup>th</sup> Oxf & Bucks) following the amalgamation of 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers with 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers and the disbandment of 7<sup>th</sup> Oxf & Bucks. 1<sup>st</sup> Welch was also reduced to cadre (temporarily), so that from September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade was made up of the 1<sup>st</sup> London Scots, the 1<sup>st</sup> London Irish Rifles and the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers. The historian of the Royal Fusiliers wrote on the amalgamation:

This was the result of an inability to find reinforcements for all the depleted battalions there were now in the field. In commenting on this process one must fairly state that the manpower position was difficult and that the Adjutant-

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<sup>95</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 13/5 Memo in the Field, Point 5, 14 March 1944

<sup>96</sup> NA WO 170/1405 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for July 1944

General took such a step as this with great regret. At the same time, one cannot fail to record the effect of such a decision on the Regiment, on the unit concerned, on the morale of the troops and on the minds of the individuals affected.<sup>97</sup>

The men from 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade (1<sup>st</sup> Buffs, 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI and 14<sup>th</sup> Sherwood Foresters) were sent to 46<sup>th</sup> Division, as reinforcements. For 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade this was a bitter end to its wartime service – there were more Africa Star ribbons in its ranks than in any other.<sup>98</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Sherwood Foresters diary noted:

It has been a difficult period for all ranks, but in spite of their disappointment at having to leave their old Bn, the men have taken the blow extremely well, and their loyalty in accepting the decisions of higher authority has not fallen below its customary high standard. In posting men to 139 Bde the policy adopted was to keep our 'older' men until last, to post our 'younger' Foresters to 5 Foresters and, so far as possible, to send those men who had been posted to us recently from other regiments, to the regiment for which they had the higher territorial or regimental claim. It is to be hoped that the spirit which they made for themselves in this Bn will go with them to their new units.<sup>99</sup>

Many receiving battalions tried to make their new drafts as welcome as possible. The 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens, for instance, got drafts from both the 7<sup>th</sup> Oxf & Bucks and the 1<sup>st</sup> Welch. "As far as possible specialists are being absorbed, the remainder being split up between rifle coys, every effort is being made to keep those who know each other together."<sup>100</sup> Major-General Hawkesworth, the 46<sup>th</sup> Division's commander, made a point of greeting the veterans as they arrived at his battalions for posting:

...propped on his long ashplant stick, he told them that they should regard themselves as footballers transferred from one team to another and that in his division the infantry were regarded as the elite, always to be allotted the best billets when out of the line, always to be provided with every possible ounce of fire support when making an attack. Certainly the men needed every possible ounce of encouragement to keep them going.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Northcote Parkinson, *Always A Fusilier*, p. 220

<sup>98</sup> Doherty, *A Noble Crusade*, p. 154

<sup>99</sup> NA WO 170/1477 14<sup>th</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters War Diary for September 1944

<sup>100</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for September 1944

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Doherty, *A Noble Crusade*, p. 254



The effect on morale can perhaps best be indicated by the reaction of a battalion that believed it was in danger of being reduced to cadre earlier in the year, but which survived – the 11<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. “The possibility of the Bn being split up is removed, for the time being at least ... on receipt of information that Bn still exists as such, spirits of troops 100% higher.”<sup>102</sup>

Not only was the disbanding of battalions bad for morale of the men involved, but cross postings had long been acknowledged as having a detrimental effect to fighting spirit. Despite this, in March 1944 it was decided that all infantry drafts from the UK would be available to reinforce any battalion, a practice that had been already in operation in the Italian campaign for some considerable time.<sup>103</sup> The Regimental History of the Irish Guards recorded that when they were due to be relieved by the Dukes at Anzio:

At dusk a slow file of men plodded up the track [towards the Boot]. They were introduced as the Dukes, but the first six men denied it and gave the names of six different regiments, till a sergeant said, “you’re Dukes now,” and then, apologetically, “They’re new, Sir, we only got them this morning.”<sup>104</sup>

On one occasion a draft of 30 men included representatives of no less than 28 different regiments.<sup>105</sup> One RASC driver has been in 16 different units.<sup>106</sup>

Where possible reinforcements were sent to battalions from the same region. On February 17<sup>th</sup> 1944 The London Scottish, for instance, received reinforcements from the Black Watch, Camerons, Cameronians, Royal Scots and Seaforths.<sup>107</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn North Staffs received reinforcements from the South Staffs and S. Lancs as well as their own

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<sup>102</sup> NA WO 170/1426 11<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for June 1944

<sup>103</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, p. 423

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 195

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, pp. 209-210

<sup>106</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 13/6 Letter to Lt.-General J. Harding, March 1944

<sup>107</sup> NA WO 170/1434 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for February 1944

regiment.<sup>108</sup> In March, 1944 Major-General Penney, Commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Division, wrote to Lt-General John Harding, CGS, GHQ, that he was trying to sort out reinforcements.

I spoke to a batch of men in the reception camp who had come from 56 Division and were originally intended for us. When I told them that it had been decided that the Green Howards would go to the Bn of that regiment in 5 Division, the Irish Fusiliers to the Inniskillings and so on their delight was transparent and a little pathetic.<sup>109</sup>

One Surrey officer noted how the character of his battalion changed with each new man from a different battalion:

Many new drafts kept building us up but rarely were they Surreys. We received Officers and men from the DCLI, Royal Norfolks, Royal Sussex, Highlanders, and eventually Gunners. The Commanding Officer... was from the Wiltshires and quite a few senior officers were not of the Regiment ... possibly over 50% of the battalion were "foreigners".<sup>110</sup>

The army normally tried to minimise these risks. In January 41 ORs were returned to the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshires from the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Hamps, with more coming from 5<sup>th</sup> Hamps.<sup>111</sup> But the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry received two drafts from the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Devons.<sup>112</sup> At least in that case the geography was close. But in May the 6<sup>th</sup> Black Watch received reinforcements not only from their own regiment, but "for some extraordinary reason 83 came from the Somerset Light Infantry and 32 from the Wilts."<sup>113</sup> Even the Irish Brigade "was full of sassenachs as well as true-born Irishmen".<sup>114</sup>

Most men, given the chance, would have returned to their own battalions. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Welch certainly chose to do so when their battalion was reformed in December. Of the 137 infantrymen who had been transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> London Scottish in September, 120

<sup>108</sup> NA WO 170/1487 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The North Staffordshire Regiment War Diaries for April & May 1944

<sup>109</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 13/6 Letter t Lt.-General J. Harding March 1944

<sup>110</sup> IWM 80/2/1 Major R.C. Taylor, Part IV, Sicily, Italy, Rome, p. 32

<sup>111</sup> NA WO 170/1396 1/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for January 1944 and NA WO 170/1399 2/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for January 1944

<sup>112</sup> NA WO 170/1379 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry War Diary for April 1944

<sup>113</sup> NA WO 170/1366 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Black Watch War Diary for May 1944

elected to return to the 1<sup>st</sup> Welch.<sup>115</sup> Of the 80-odd men who had been transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> London Irish Rifles, 50 chose to return to the 1<sup>st</sup> Welch. Their departure from the 1<sup>st</sup> London Irish Rifles caused the latter problems in turn:

The result of two officers and approx. 50 ORs leaving necessitated a considerable amount of reorganisation. In order to bring the other coys up to strength, 'A' Coy which had only been reformed a few days before had to be reduced to a skeleton and took upon the responsibility of a reinforcement coy. At a time when people were just beginning to settle down the loss of the Welch men was very disturbing and put the clock back considerably.<sup>116</sup>

The treatment of men on their way to their new units, or indeed of any men being cross-posted, and their sense of resentment influenced their fighting spirit once they arrived at their new battalions:

The state of morale of the average reinforcement by the time he finally reached his unit was a factor which cannot be ignored. The atmosphere of the base depot and the apparently incalculable way in which the Army ordered the life of the reinforcement were factors which, although perhaps often inevitable had a marked effect upon the men concerned. The soul-destroying feeling, often persisting for months on end of being 'nobody's baby' undoubtedly did immense harm to some men's self-respect and self-confidence; for them, it was the small points which mattered most: the Englishman posted to unit composed almost entirely of Glasgow Scots; the hospital casualty who had spent his entire Army career with one regiment posted on discharge to a new unit; the man who languished seemingly forgotten, at a base depot; or the man who was switched from unit to unit and never settled down; these were the trivial beginnings which so often ended in a charge of desertion.<sup>117</sup>

The Salerno "mutiny" was the strongest expression of the soldiers' dislike of cross-postings. Some 1,500 British reinforcement landed at Salerno on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1943. "It was said – in an army where no one ever volunteered for anything – that the new arrivals were all volunteers from Monty's Eighth Army, men who had even risen from their sick

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<sup>114</sup> Horsfall, *Fling our Banner to the Wind*, p. 10

<sup>115</sup> NA WO 170/1436 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for December 1944

<sup>116</sup> NA WO 170/1432 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for December 1944

<sup>117</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 3

beds to come and fight.”<sup>118</sup> Most, in fact, were young draftees being posted to their first units. Others were indeed Eighth Army veterans from the 50<sup>th</sup> & 51<sup>st</sup> Divisions, but they had not volunteered to help X Corps. They had been told at Eighth Army 155 Transit Camp in Tripoli, where most of them were recovering from wounds or malaria, that they would be going back to their own Divisions. The 50<sup>th</sup> (Tyne Tees) Division had strong battalion loyalties, and the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division was renowned for its strong divisional and clan loyalties. The men of both Divisions had always been told by their officers, right up to Montgomery, that if they were wounded they would always be returned to their old units. The return of wounded to their unit was considered to be of great importance to the morale not only of the wounded man, but of the unit as a whole.<sup>119</sup> When they discovered that they were destined for other Divisions at Salerno instead, they staged a “sit-in” in the field where they had been directed upon their arrival there.

When Captain Rankin of 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry heard that men from his Regiment were involved in the “sit-in”, he went down to the field and quickly discovered that they did not want to join either the 46<sup>th</sup> or the 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions. Rankin found it difficult to sympathise with the new arrivals. Excessive loyalty, he felt, was understandable, but deliberate refusal to fight when ordered amounted to mutiny.<sup>120</sup> That seemed to be the general consensus among the 16<sup>th</sup> DLI. “I don’t think many of us had much sympathy for them because we accepted that they’d had a pretty hard time, a lot of them had been wounded and they were cheesed off, but you’re in the army and you do what you’re told or

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<sup>118</sup> Whiting & Taylor, *Fighting Tykes*, p. 25

<sup>119</sup> NA WO 163/162 Morale Committee Reports from Overseas Commands. November 1943-January 1944

<sup>120</sup> Hickey & Smith, *Operation Avalanche*, pp. 306-307

suffer the consequences – that’s the point.”<sup>121</sup> Another DLI officer, Colonel Johnny Preston, decided to see if he could persuade the protesters to join his battalion. “I give you my firm promise as an officer, and Johnny Preston always keeps his word, that as soon as the situation here resolves you will go back to your own battalions – you’ve got my firm word on that!” All but a few decided to take up his offer.<sup>122</sup> Among the Scotsmen only the Black Watch men marched off the field en bloc as reinforcements, and that was because they had one of their own regimental officers with them, whom they knew.<sup>123</sup> Some of the Black Watch men decided in the end to remain with their new battalions, when rumours that 51<sup>st</sup> Division was being trained for a future landing began circulating, on the grounds of “better what you know ...”.<sup>124</sup> Lieutenant-General McCreery, commander of X Corps, tried to talk to the mutineers. He promised them that as soon as the military situation improved they would be returned to their units, that if they carried out their duties in a proper manner the whole incident would be forgotten and no one would suffer.<sup>125</sup> All but 192 men decided to respond to his pleas. The Salerno Mutiny was, in fact, the largest mutiny in the British Army in the Second World War: 192 men were found guilty of mutiny and sentenced to several years’ imprisonment.

There is some controversy about the urgency felt by the Eighth Army men to leave 155 Transit camp. Saul David maintains in *Mutiny at Salerno* that the men were motivated only by their desire to return to their units, and that they had no prior knowledge of the impending return to the UK of 50<sup>th</sup> & 51<sup>st</sup> Divisions from Sicily. The final decision to send

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<sup>121</sup> Hart, *The Heat of Battle*, p. 50

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 50

<sup>123</sup> David, *Mutiny at Salerno*, p. 43

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, pp. 73–4

<sup>125</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 208

the Divisions home was not made officially until September 18<sup>th</sup>, three days after the men left Tripoli, and the various battalions were not informed officially until October.<sup>126</sup> According to General McCreery, however, the situation was somewhat different. A decision had already been taken in London by the Second Front planners that the two divisions would be returned to the UK and bad security had ensured that this news had percolated through all ranks.<sup>127</sup> The only fear of the convalescing soldiers was that if they remained in the transit camp they would miss the homeward-bound draft and after three years in the desert that was too bitter to contemplate.<sup>128</sup>

Whatever the motives of the mutineers, three points stand out. The first is that, even among the mutineers, sick and tired though they were, there is no evidence that the men would refuse to fight if they were returned to their own units. Morale, in its most limited definition, does not therefore seem to have been an issue here. The second was the importance of officers who were known to the men in influencing the actions of the men. The third was the fact that by 1943 the regimental system had to a large extent broken down and the Salerno mutiny highlighted the extent to which that breakdown was resented by some men. Regimental loyalty had been fostered by all means possible since the Cardwell-Childers Reforms of 1870-1881 and it did, indeed, play a major role with regard to morale among regular soldiers in particular.<sup>129</sup> A major in the Oxf & Bucks wrote:

I wish we could be reinforced by officers and men from the Regiment; there must be plenty of Regimental officers who could be sent out to us. I know that Regimental esprit de corps is of tremendous value in keeping up the morale of troops when they are tired and conditions are not too good; but the policy of treating officers and men as so many numbers and posting them hither and

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<sup>126</sup> David, *Mutiny at Salerno*, p. 64.

<sup>127</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 204/6627 *Manpower*, 18 August 1943

<sup>128</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 209

<sup>129</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. V, pp. 421-2

thither at random makes the task of keeping alive a regimental spirit well-nigh impossible.<sup>130</sup>

Although the most famous, Salerno was not the only occasion when aggrieved men mutinied during the Italian campaign. Sometime in 1944 a party of Royal Fusiliers returning from hospital refused to join another regiment and they were court martialled. They even served part of their prison sentence before being accepted back into the Royal Fusiliers. Their adjutant believed that their imprisonment had arisen "because of bad man-management as they were known to be first class soldiers."<sup>131</sup> Poor man management was also highlighted in the case of some Anzio reinforcements who did not belong to battalions fighting in the beachhead in that at no time had been informed that they would not be returning to their own regiments. "Personnel under reference belong to Cameronians and Seaforths. It is important that such rfts are fully informed of the position before the despatch."<sup>132</sup>

The third major source of reinforcements were ex-hospital personnel, and many battalions had to wait until their own men returned from hospital. Ex-hospital personnel could not, however, fill the gaps completely. The 56<sup>th</sup> Division ADMS recorded that of the 2,800 casualties from the Division whose whereabouts was known, 1,000 were not likely to return to their battalions.<sup>133</sup> Men were not automatically returned to their own units from hospital. "Owing to the present difficult rft situation, particularly as regards infantry, it has become

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<sup>130</sup> IWM 95/33/1 Major D.A. Phillips Letter to his Mother, March 1944.

<sup>131</sup> IWM 80/46/1 G. Allnutt, Chapter VI, p. 2

<sup>132</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy Letter from Brigadier ADAG, 23 February 1944

<sup>133</sup> NA WO 177/414 Medical Diary - ADMS 56<sup>th</sup> Division November 1944

necessary in certain circumstances to treat ex-hospital personnel as pool rfts.”<sup>134</sup> This led to discontent among the personnel concerned.

Shortage of man-power for infantry also resulted in men who had served and perhaps fought and been wounded in one regiment, being posted on return to another regiment in which they were strangers.<sup>135</sup>

The need to maintain the good will and morale of the ex-hospital personnel was always a consideration. Using a carrot and stick technique, the IRTD was told to inform the unhappy ex-hospital personnel “that their not being returned to their original unit will merely delay the successful prosecution of the present battle, and consequently their return to their own units.”<sup>136</sup> By December 1944 56<sup>th</sup> Division policy “now is to reinforce a battalion in the line only with men who have been in it before (i.e. returning sick and wounded). Why wasn’t that thought of years ago?” mused one battalion diarist facetiously.<sup>137</sup>

## VI

Illness, battle casualties and desertion, although the principal ones, were not the only contributory factors in the manpower crisis. Strategic considerations also played their part. Alexander lost five divisions, mostly French and American units, to Operation ANVIL (later renamed DRAGOON), the invasion of the South of France timed to coincide with Operation OVERLORD, and only received the equivalent of one and a half divisions in return. This placed extra strain on the divisions left fighting in Italy. In addition, the PYTHON Scheme, which gave home leave to long-serving soldiers, came into operation in

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<sup>134</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy, August 1943-March 1944 Letter from AFHQ to HQ IRTD, 19 February 1944

<sup>135</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 3

<sup>136</sup> NA WO 204/6627 Reinforcements Policy Letter from AFHQ to HQ IRTD, 19 February 1944

<sup>137</sup> NA WO 170/1466 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for December 1944



1944 for soldiers who had been on active service for at least five years. For most of 1943, only men who had served overseas for more than six years were posted back to the UK. However, in October of 1943, with the opening up of the Mediterranean to more Allied ships after Operation HUSKY and the surrender of the Italian fleet, it became possible to start an exchange scheme, whereby men who had completed six years' service abroad were posted home, with, in theory, replacements being sent out from the UK on a man for man basis. By January 1944 it was possible to reduce the qualifying period to five years, with eligibility based on five years' overseas service before 1st January 1944.<sup>138</sup> It was not possible to reduce it further due to the shortage of reinforcements available from the UK "where every available man is needed at present for the building up of the armies which are to invade the Continent."<sup>139</sup> By May there was a shortfall of 2,000 reinforcements from the UK against the numbers being repatriated through PYTHON, and it was known that the next draft home of 1,000 men to the UK would only see 400 replacements in return.<sup>140</sup>

In May 1944 the Adjutant General, Sir Ronald Adam, was well aware of the compound effect this was having on the manpower crisis in Italy, but he wrote to General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, asking whether he would care to consider continuing to send home the maximum number of men with overseas service without insisting upon a head for head exchange. Adam realised that this might not be possible, but asked Wilson to consider it "in view of the undoubted damage to the morale of a force which feels it is condemned indefinitely to a minimum of five years or

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<sup>138</sup> NA WO 204/10170 Repatriation of Long-Service Personnel Open Letter by General Sir. H. Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, "To be read by all ranks with four and a half years or more continuous service overseas", June 1944

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, GHQ, MEF Open Letter, "To be read by all ranks with four and a half years or more of continuous service overseas", May 1944

more continuous service overseas, you may feel that an enlargement of the numbers sent home, if necessary without replacement, may pay high dividends in improved morale and so not cause any nett loss of efficiency.”<sup>141</sup>

PYTHON created a permanent wastage from all overseas commands which had to be taken seriously into account in all manpower calculations.<sup>142</sup> Particularly damaging were the losses of senior NCOs. In July 1944, because of the high number of Warrant Officers and NCOs due to be repatriated, it was decided to retain half their number in Italy for a further month.<sup>143</sup> The loss of so many experienced men, the backbone of their units, was obviously of considerable concern to many battalions. A report on the sharply declining morale of one battalion highlighted the “ineffectiveness of young NCOs”.<sup>144</sup>

Personnel repatriated to the UK under PYTHON were posted to Home Establishments for a period of not less than three months, including disembarkation leave, before being considered for posted to another theatre, “and will then only be posted to North West Europe unless they volunteer for despatch to any other theatre.”<sup>145</sup> Despite this assurance, when the required length of service was reduced to four and a half years, the reduction was greeted with reserve – “was it perhaps a government trap to get men to the Far East?”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, Letter from The Adjutant General to General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, 8 May 1944

<sup>142</sup> NA WO 277/12 “Manpower Problems”, p. 52

<sup>143</sup> NA WO 204/10170 Repatriation of Long-Service Personnel Letter from Lt-Col. Peter Higgins, 5 July 1944

<sup>144</sup> NA WO 204/6683 Royal West Kents – Replacement of Battle Weary and Unsuitable Personnel Appendix A, Point 16

<sup>145</sup> NA WO 170/3 General Routine Orders by General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre, 18 August 1944, Item 661 Return to UK of Long Service Personnel

<sup>146</sup> NA CAB 106/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 20

Men could waive their place on PYTHON if they wished by signing a certificate. "I can cancel this certificate whenever I wish, merely by the stroke of a pen, and will then be put back at the top of the waiting list for a passage home," wrote one artillery officer. His reasons for staying in Italy were mixed. Firstly, self-interest played its part in that he would have to take a reduction in rank if he returned to the UK. Secondly, "I want to be in on the kill. I want to see the Germans in Italy smashed as I saw them smashed in Tunisia. And I want to experience the thrill of crossing the German frontier as a member of the Eighth Army."<sup>147</sup>

But the majority of men serving in Italy did not qualify for PYTHON, and mindful of the ill effects of prolonged service overseas, the Army introduced the LIAP Scheme (Leave in Addition to PYTHON) in October 1944. The first men to enjoy 28 days' home leave the UK under the LIAP Scheme started leaving Italy in November. Places were allotted within units according to the length of continuous service overseas. The numbers involved were small, only 2,000 men in each convoy sailing at intervals of 18-21 days, or about 3,000 per month.<sup>148</sup> LIAP was limited to "personnel medically fit and desirous of returning to this Command and accepted on the grounds of special qualifications for return because of:- (a) Knowledge and experience of non-U.K. troops, or (b) Special knowledge of this Theatre of Operations"<sup>149</sup> However, there was a price to pay vis-à-vis the manpower situation of such home leave. "No replacements are provided from U.K. for those personnel who may be granted leave under this GRO. In many cases it may be impossible to provide

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<sup>147</sup> C. Seton-Watson, *Dunkirk-Alamein-Bologna; Letters and Diaries of an Artilleryman 1939-1945* (London: Buckland Publications, 1993) p. 237

<sup>148</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 6, Leave to the UK, p. 1



\*What – go home on leave in an English winter!\*

replacements for those who qualify. For these reasons this HQ will be the final authority for deciding if the granting of such leave is in the best interests of the service.”<sup>150</sup>

The Morale Committee reported that the scheme “was greeted with derision by the majority and thought to be a vote catching device or, at the best, a proof that the period of PYTHON could have been reduced if the authorities had been willing to do so.”<sup>151</sup> Despite this assessment, LIAP was particularly suited to those men who wanted to see the war out in Italy, with their mates, and infantry battalions seem to have reacted favourably. The 1<sup>st</sup> RWK battalion diary recorded that “Major Brock and 13 ORs were reported to be walking on air, having been detailed by the CO to proceed on leave to England.”<sup>152</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards reported that “the first leave party to England, consisting of 9 ORs, left the Bn today amidst much excitement and revelry”.<sup>153</sup> In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards “hearts were set a fluttering in the Bn when the first ten men were selected for home leave.”<sup>154</sup>

## VII

Despite exploiting all possible sources of infantry replacements, the position grew steadily worse in the later stages of the campaign. On October 21<sup>st</sup> 1944 there was a total number of 782 officers and 11,455 OR infantry reinforcements held in CMF, of whom 408 officers and 4,610 ORs were available for immediate posting. There were also a further 20 officers

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<sup>149</sup> NA WO 170/4 G1(Br) AFHQ War Diary for October General Routine Orders by General Sir H. Mailland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre, 13 October 1944. Item 818, Python

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> NA WO 32/15772 The War Office Committee on Morale, Report of the Committee, The Army Overseas Dec 44-Feb 45 Part I, Section I, Morale in General.

<sup>152</sup> NA WO 170/1419 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for November 1944

<sup>153</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for November 1944

<sup>154</sup> NA WO 170/1348 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for November 1944

and 550 ORs available for posting from hospital.<sup>155</sup> It was estimated in October, however, that Infantry deficiencies would reach between 5,000 and 11,270 by December 31<sup>st</sup>, depending on the casualty rate.<sup>156</sup> There were just not enough infantrymen available for immediate deployment.

**Table 3.5**  
**Officer & OR Infantry Reinforcements held in the CMF<sup>157</sup>**

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Held in CMF</u>		<u>Available for Immediate Posting</u>	
	<u>Officers:</u>	<u>ORs:</u>	<u>Officers:</u>	<u>ORs</u>
December 27 <sup>th</sup> 1944	484	9,732	175	263
January 31 <sup>st</sup> 1945	558	10,680	229	2,283

The manpower shortage remained acute and by the end of 1944 all infantry battalions were reduced to three Rifle Companies.<sup>158</sup> This was seen as “an unsatisfactory if inevitable solution” to the manpower crisis.<sup>159</sup> But it had a detrimental impact on operational effectiveness. In December, when the 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade was operating on a wide front, “the absence of the fourth coy was very much felt.” Not only at times was there not even a reserve platoon in the Bn, but the lack of a reserve coy pushed more work onto the existing coys.<sup>160</sup> The new WE might have helped with depleted battalions’ administrative problems, but did not add any manpower to the remaining over-stretched and war-weary units. Italy only received a small trickle of reinforcements in 1945:

<sup>155</sup> NA WO 170/49 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for October 1944

<sup>156</sup> NA WO 204/6615 Manpower Planning February 1944-June 1945 Summary of Infantry Reinforcement Situation, 4 October 1944

<sup>157</sup> Figures taken from NA WO170/51 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon, War Diary for December 1944 and NA WO 170/4125 CMF Allied Forces Italy, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon War Diary for January 1945

<sup>158</sup> Jackson, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 371

<sup>159</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for November 1944

**Figure 3.6**  
**British Army (Male) Reinforcements arriving in Italy, 1945**<sup>161</sup>

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Officers:</u>	<u>ORs:</u>
January 24:	299	1,524
February 7:	148	810
February 21:	76	1,366
March 21:	243	1,898
April 4:	11	186

Some relief was finally afforded to the hard pressed battalions in March 1945, when it was decided that units could demand reinforcements to replace personnel AWOL eight days after the commence of the absence or when the soldier was apprehended, whichever was the earlier. "As the numbers reported in this way are taken into account when unit rtf entitlements are being calculated, care will be taken to ensure that all absentees are included ..."<sup>162</sup>

## VIII

The most serious indication of the problem in Italy was the number of soldiers with good records who eventually broke down under the strain of prolonged action.<sup>163</sup> One soldier remembered:

Of course we got used to this diminution of strength ...but over time it had its effect even when in a static position; wider frontages, more frequent patrol and sentry duty, and less sleep (particularly during the long nights of winter). All this contributed to an added sense of strain and lower morale.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> NA WO 170/1432 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for December 1944

<sup>161</sup> Figures taken from NA WO 170/4125 CMF Allied Forces Italy GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon Progress Reports G-1 (B)/501/DAG Diary for January 1945; NA WO 170/4126 CMF Allied Forces Italy GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon Progress Reports G-1 (B)/501/DAG Diary for February 1945; NA WO 170/4127 CMF Allied Forces Italy GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon Progress Reports G-1 (B)/501/DAG Diary for March 1945; NA WO 170/4128 CMF Allied Forces Italy GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon Progress Reports G-1 (B)/501/DAG Diary for April 1945

<sup>162</sup> NA WO 170/5040 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for March 1945 Appendix B to 167 (Lon Infantry Brigade Administrative Order No. 6)

<sup>163</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1944, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 2

<sup>164</sup> Anon., "The Desertion Crisis in Italy", pp. 84-87

The need to return men again and again to the line after evacuation for wounds or exhaustion because of the lack of reinforcements, regardless of whether they went back to their own battalion or not, provoked its own morale crisis. Such men felt that they would go on being sent back into the line until they were killed, totally incapacitated by wounds, or broke down and deserted.

Prolonged combat drains all men, that is all except for a few supermen I've heard of but never met, of their reserves of courage and resolve. Some completely, some only partially, some sooner, some later but the process, once begun, progresses with each fresh exposure to fire. Thus does the man eventually have to fight two wars, one without and one within. And as frightful as may be the first, it is almost as nothing, compared to the frightfulness of the second, for that one he fights alone, therein lays true bravery.<sup>165</sup>

A shortage of infantry reinforcements, insufficient to keep up with the losses sustained through illness or battle casualties, had a detrimental affect on the fighting spirit of the infantry. Infantry battalions often had to reduce their number of rifle companies, with fewer men shouldering an ever-heavier burden of responsibility. The pool of men available for patrolling shrank dramatically; men were forced to spend longer in the line; they became more exhausted and thus more liable to suffer from war weariness and breakdowns. Manpower shortages were elemental in degrading morale and it was against a background of acute manpower difficulties that the desertion rate rose.

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<sup>165</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, Chapter 16, p. 128



## CHAPTER IV

### DESERTERS AND ABSENTEES

Desertion is the illegal absence from duty by a soldier. "The offence of desertion – that is to say, of deserting or attempting to desert his Majesty's service - implies an intention on the part of the offender either not to return to His Majesty's service at all, or to escape some particularly important service as mentioned in para. 16" [see footnote for para. 16].<sup>1</sup> The criterion between desertion and absence without leave was *intention*.<sup>2</sup> "...Absence without leave may be described as such short absence, unaccompanied by disguise, concealment, or other suspicious circumstances, as occurs when a soldier does not return to his corps or duty at the proper time, but on returning is able to show that he did not intend to quit the service, or to evade the performance of some service so important as to render the offence desertion."<sup>3</sup> Twenty-one days was the officially accepted length of time within which an absentee, whose intention was to return to his unit, would demonstrate that intention. After that period, he would be declared a deserter.<sup>4</sup>

The desertion and AWOL rate is usually seen as the most potent expression of discontent and poor morale and in Italy it reached endemic proportions (see Appendix IV), particularly towards the end of the campaign. The number of Court Martial convictions for Desertion and Absenteeism in all overseas commands from September 1<sup>st</sup> 1943-August 31<sup>st</sup> 1944 was

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<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Military Law* (London: HMSO, 1929/Reprinted 1939), p. 19 Para 16: "A man who absents himself in a deliberate or clandestine manner, with the view of shirking some important service though he may intend to return when the evasion of the service is accomplished, is liable to be convicted of desertion just as if an intention *never* to return had been proved against him."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> MacPherson, *Discipline*, p. 49

4,819.<sup>5</sup> The number of cases of AWOL and Desertion reported to 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon in Italy between October 1943 and August 1944 was 5,380 (see below, Table 4.2). Not all of these cases, of course, ended up in front of FGCsM, but it is evident that the vast majority of British Army overseas deserters and absentees during that specific period were from the Italian campaign. Certainly, rising desertion from the winter of 1943/44 increasingly exercised the minds of corps and divisional commanders in Italy, who became aware of a steady increase in the figures during the winter of 1943 because it was occurring chiefly among front-line soldiers (see Appendix III) and was highly contagious. “It may well have been the appearance of the infection among men of excellent military character which started them worrying”.<sup>6</sup> In February 1944 Lt.-General McCreery, Commander, X Corps, wrote to Lt.-General Harding, Alexander’s Chief of Staff, about his concerns and urged immediate action. “Often a considerable proportion of those deserting are not front line soldiers, they may be men from “B” Echelons etc. The great majority of deserters, however, are from the infantry, which clearly shows that the disease starts in those units which are most exposed to enemy action.”<sup>7</sup> “Generally speaking”, wrote Brigadier Scott-Eliot, Commander 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (56<sup>th</sup> Division), desertion “is an Infantry problem, due simply to the fact that men of other Arms are not subjected to the same degree of continuous mental and physical strain in battle.”<sup>8</sup> The principal areas of investigation vis-à-vis desertion and morale are:

- (a) What was the desertion rate in Italy?
- (b) Why did men desert?
- (c) Who deserted? Did ORs desert more readily than officers and NCOs?

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<sup>5</sup> NA WO 93/55 Judge Advocate General’s Office: Summary of Court-Martial Convictions (British Other Ranks) (Overseas Commands) Appendix I(c)

<sup>6</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 35

<sup>7</sup> NA WO 204/6712 Discipline: Deserters and Absentees McCreery letter to Harding, 15 February 1944

<sup>8</sup> LHCMA Brigadier Scott-Eliot “The 5<sup>th</sup> Casualty, Battle Absentees”, p. 1

- (d) Was there any difference between Regular and Territorial Divisions?
- (e) When did men desert?
- (f) What was the soldiers' attitude towards deserters?

## I

The British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean, produced the following statistics after the war. These are convictions by Field General Court Martial for Desertion in Italy:

**Table 4.1**  
**FGCM Figures for Desertion during the Italian Campaign<sup>9</sup>**

<u>1943:</u>		<u>1944 (cont):</u>		<u>1945:</u>	
October:	162	May	299	January	473
November	29	June	271	February	426
December	150	July	160	March	358
<u>1944:</u>		August	251	April	476
January	177	September	245	May	150
February	173	October	184	June	258
March	285	November	251		
April	330	December	586	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>5,694</b>

Table 4.2 is the total number of cases of AWOL and Desertion by United Kingdom troops reported to GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon for the whole theatre:

**Table 4.2**  
**Total No. of cases of AWOL and Desertion reported to 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon in Italy<sup>10</sup>**

<u>1943:</u>		<u>1944 (cont):</u>		<u>1945:</u>	
October	243	May	495	January	1127
November	212	June	994	February	616
December	369	July	779	March	404
<u>1944:</u>		August	628	April	153
January	349	September	944	May	242
February	207	October	905	June	154
March	521	November	1200		
April	583	December	1211	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b><u>12,336</u></b>

As with all statistics, there are problems associated with the desertion and AWOL figures.

Firstly, it is a possibility that what the figures really measure were the changes in the

<sup>9</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943-2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 6

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

willingness of the military authorities to use the system of formal discipline to punish offenders: the Absence Without Leave statistics (see Appendix II) show that less than 50% of AWOL cases were from the infantry, indicating that front-line troops were more liable to be charged with the more serious offence of Desertion.

Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that some AWOL cases in the front line went unreported. To illustrate this with just one case, from an officer at Monte Cassino:

The soldiers had to lie in cramped positions in their two-man sangars, often wet and cold. They took it in turn to sleep by day; at night, they had to be alert and occasionally take turns in patrolling. There was a steady dribble of casualties with nightly evacuation of stretcher cases from the RAP. It was agonising to see a fine fighting team wasting away. Under these appalling conditions six Fusiliers, recent reinforcements to the Battalion attempted to desert. They abandoned three adjacent sangars leaving a defenceless gape that jeopardised the lives of their comrades. This was plain cowardice but I felt that arresting them and sending them for a court-martial was not a practical option. I had already made it clear that only wounded would be permitted to leave the battle area. A battle patrol was detailed to intercept the men and force them to return to their sangars. There was a sharp scuffle in the dark before they were led back to the front line. News of this spread round the Battalion and I was told that the outcome was considered just ... There was, however, a happy outcome for our six. They worked hard and fought well to redeem themselves in the eyes of their comrades. Some months afterwards the men asked to see me; they said how sorry they were for the incident below the Monastery and expressed their relief that they had not had to face a court-martial.<sup>11</sup>

A third caveat in dealing with the desertion and AWOL statistics is that there is no reliable, established baseline from which to judge how excessive desertion was in Italy. In his report on operations in Sicily, Lt.-Colonel Wigram, a Territorial officer of the Royal Fusiliers, and commandant of the GHQ Battle School in England prior to his service with the 5<sup>th</sup> Buffs in Sicily, indicated that “the platoon in action is almost invariably only twenty-two strong, and, of whatever regiment, good or bad, every platoon can be analysed as

follows: six gutful men who will go anywhere and do anything,” (who usually became the first casualties) “twelve ‘sheep’ who will follow a short distance behind if they are well led, and from four to six ineffective men who have not got it in them even to be really good soldiers.”<sup>12</sup> Wigram suggested that the average number of deserters and men absent without leave per battalion before and during every campaign was 40-60 which, he believed, was a roughly accurate figure as was shown by the number of Courts Martial for running away that follow every campaign.<sup>13</sup> But doubt was cast upon Wigram’s figures in another review of the Sicilian campaign, a report by an Observer, Major P.J.D. Johnson, who pointed out that while Wigram’s contention was supported by an (unnamed) Brigade commander and the (unnamed) Division commander, the views of other divisions were not obtained and that “without further investigation this theory should perhaps be accepted with reserve.”<sup>14</sup> Brigadier Scott-Elliot believed that there were about 300-400 Battle Absentees in the average British division in any six month period in Italy.<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to ascertain monthly averages for any single battalion during the campaign because battalions only started detailing absentees and deserters in their War Diaries towards the end of 1944. In addition, from the limited figures available, battalions differed widely in their rates of desertion both individually, during the course of the campaign, and in comparison with other battalions at any given time. What is evident from the figures for monthly convictions by Field General Court Martial statistics, however, is that there was a strong upward trend during both winters, particularly in 1944/45, and at the height of the Cassino/Anzio breakout period. In view of the manpower problems, each individual case

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<sup>11</sup> Lt. Col R. Porter (ed), *CO 2LF 78 Division: The Battle Experiences of an Infantry Commander*, Brigadier J. Mackenzie (privately published, 1997) pp. 34-5

<sup>12</sup> NA WO 231/14 Operations in Sicily: Notes on the Campaign, Operational and Administrative Reports, 9 December 1943

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Report by Lt.-Col Lionel Wigram, Commander 5<sup>th</sup> Buffs.

of desertion was considered by senior commanders to be far more serious than might have been the case earlier in the war, since every infantryman lost in Italy through desertion had a profoundly negative effect on the ability of front-line units to prosecute the war.

## II

That being so, why did men desert? In the main, the reasons for desertion were agreed by all commanders in Italy. The Adjutant-General outlined the causes in February 1944 thus:

A study of cases both at the trial and in prison show that deserters in the main fall into the following categories:-

- (a) 5 per cent are criminals who have no interest in or intention of fighting. They are a nuisance and a menace anywhere.
- (b) Men desert who are nervous and should never have been in the line at all. They are immature.
- (c) They desert because they have been overseas too long, e.g. 2 Dorsets and 2 Devons of 239 Inf Bde from Malta
- (d) Because they have been in the line too long or consider they have had too much continuous fighting
- (e) They are sent as reinforcements to strange regiments or battalions in which they have no friends and find they cannot make friends.

Of the above factors (d) is the most prevalent, followed by (e). Manpower shortage is responsible for both.<sup>16</sup>

## III

Long periods spent in the line was one of the major contributory factors in desertion. The longer a Division remained in the line, the more tired the soldiers became, and the higher the absentee rate. FGCM Figures for August and September 1943, per division, exemplify this. 5<sup>th</sup> Division was the only "fresh" division and its desertion rate reflected this.

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<sup>14</sup> NA WO 204/7543 Lessons from "HUSKY" Report by DMT Observer Major P.J.D. Johnson

<sup>15</sup> LHCMA Scott-Elliot Papers, Battle Absentees, 10 April 44

<sup>16</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Letters from Sir Ronald Adam to CAO, 25 February 1944

**Table 4.3****No. of men, per division, sentenced by FGCM in August and September 1943<sup>17</sup>**

<u>Division</u>	<u>No. of Men Tried by FGCM</u>
5 <sup>th</sup> Division:	0
50 <sup>th</sup> Division:	47
51 <sup>st</sup> Division:	63
78 <sup>th</sup> Division:	27

Field General Courts Martial figures for Desertion for individual battalions which fought at Anzio, although imprecise, indicate a similar experience. As Table 4.4 shows, 1<sup>st</sup> Division, which came to Anzio fresh, had considerably fewer deserters (36) than the battle-weary 5<sup>th</sup> & 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions (123 and 75 deserters respectively).

**Table 4.4****Nos. of men, per battalion found guilty of Desertion by FGCM, April-June 1944<sup>18</sup>**

<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Nos. found guilty of desertion by FGCM April-June</u>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Bn North Staffs (1 <sup>st</sup> Div)	8
1 <sup>st</sup> Bn D.W.R. (1st Div)	16
2 <sup>nd</sup> Bn Foresters (1 <sup>st</sup> Div)	12
8 <sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Fusiliers (56 <sup>th</sup> Div)	19
9 <sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Fusiliers (56 <sup>th</sup> Div)	25
7 Ox & Bucks (56 <sup>th</sup> Div)	31
1 <sup>st</sup> Bn York & Lancaster (5 <sup>th</sup> Div)	37
1 <sup>st</sup> KOYLI (5 <sup>th</sup> Div)	41
6 <sup>th</sup> Bn Seaforths (5 <sup>th</sup> Div)	45

Long periods of front-line duty was a factor highlighted by Lt.Col. John Sparrow, Secretary of the Adjutant-General's Morale Committee, in a report he produced during a fact-finding mission to Italy in the summer of 1944. He discussed the problem of desertion in Italy in some detail, having been impressed "by its size and its urgency and the difficulty of solving it."<sup>19</sup> He discussed the situation with the staffs at AAI, Eighth Army, formation HQ,

<sup>17</sup> NA WO 213/51 FGCM Abroad, 12 July –16 November 1943 and NA WO 213/53 FGCM Abroad, 17 November 1943-9 April 1944

<sup>18</sup> NA WO 213/58 and NA WO 213/60 Records of FGCM Abroad

<sup>19</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, 1943 December-1945 March Notes of Tour of Italy: June-July 1944, compiled by Lt. Col. J. Sparrow

regimental officers, the senior Psychiatrist Eighth Army and officers of the JAG's staff, including the Permanent President at Eighth Army's Court-Martial and Holding Centre. He also interviewed informally 16 prisoners awaiting trial or promulgation, and came to the conclusion that the chief cause of desertion was prolonged action which was greatly increased by close contact with the enemy. One soldier recalled:

They'd had enough. I mean, British infantry was in the line 10 times longer than the Yanks, the French, the Poles, any bugger else, the lads had had enough.....

You'd get ready to go into line, and then so-and-so would be missing. You knew they'd be back after three months, maybe they'd had enough. The longest I was in the line was 31 days without a wash, shave or a hot meal. When we came out we had three nights' rest, then we were back in the line again. Some men just couldn't take it.<sup>20</sup>

He added:

The lads that ran away would have a fit of remorse and hand themselves in once they had had a rest and a couple of good feeds. Everyone understood that. I would never call a man a coward. I was very, very near to it myself. It was only better men than me that kept me in the line ....<sup>21</sup>

#### IV

It was not just length of service and time in the line that contributed to the rising desertion statistics. The conditions in which the men existed in the front line were also of paramount importance. For most of the over-stretched infantrymen, the single most important element in degrading morale was the weather. The winter of 1943/44 was the wettest winter for at least 30 years, according to the locals, and the rain was followed by snow. The rivers flooded and the ground became a quagmire. The typical thunderous deluges of cold rain which fell that autumn and winter "numbed the mind, the body, and sapped the morale."<sup>22</sup> In November the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn KOYLI noted that the weather was particularly vile, with sleet and

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<sup>20</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16719 E. Grey, Reel 5

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Reel 6



snow turning all paths into muddy rivulets by day, and that companies were being relieved every 72 hours.<sup>23</sup> One war diary, with typical British understatement, noted that the wind, rain and very rough country on the slopes of Mt. Maggiore at the end of December all made living conditions “very trying”.<sup>24</sup> A journalist wrote:

Our troops were living in almost inconceivable misery. The fertile black valleys were knee deep in mud. Thousands of the men had not been dry for weeks. Other thousands lay at night in the high mountains with the temperatures below freezing and the thin snow sifting over them. They dug into the stones and slept in little chasms and behind rocks and in half caves. They lived like men of prehistoric times and a club would have become them more than a machine gun. How they survived the dreadful winter at all was beyond us who had the opportunity of drier beds in the warmer valleys.<sup>25</sup>

At the beginning of 1944, the winter weather and the conditions in which the troops of 78<sup>th</sup> Division existed were hard to endure. The Division saw in the New Year in the region of Pescara. Snow made the roads completely impassable and electricity supplies were cut off for several days.<sup>26</sup> The Irish Brigade had the worse time. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Royal Irish Rifles withdrew companies from the hills and in blizzard conditions parties with mules had to go to assist each company back. The snow was so deep, three feet in some places, that three of the mules had to be abandoned.<sup>27</sup> In the blizzards bulldozers and snowploughs were useless and it was impossible to get supplies up to forward companies. A rations truck from 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings became snowed up only two kilometres from the battalion headquarters and a ski party of 16 Italian civilians had to go out with big rucksacks, which could each hold 14 loaves of bread, to bring back the rations.<sup>28</sup> One of their patrols, which had gone out on December 31<sup>st</sup>, was lost and a Polish officer and two civilians went out on

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<sup>22</sup> Milligan, *Mussolini*, p. 120

<sup>23</sup> NA WO 169/10244 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Diary for November 1943

<sup>24</sup> NA WO 169/10252 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for December 1943

<sup>25</sup> From an Ernie Pyle Scripps-Howard column, quoted in Morris, *Circles of Hell*, pp. 272-3

<sup>26</sup> NA WO 170/1368 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diary for January 1944

<sup>27</sup> NA WO 170/1433 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for January 1944

<sup>28</sup> NA WO 170/1404 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for January 1944

## SUNNY ITALY

One day I picked up a book  
And read it through so rigidly,  
'Twas written by a man named Cook,  
Who called it "Sunny Italy".

It said blue skies and burning sun,  
And girls that sang so prettily,  
And happy laughter, joy and fun,  
Were joys of Sunny Italy.

And sitting there, a thought flashed quick,  
Went through my head unwillingly,  
A place to visit I should pick,  
Was surely Sunny Italy.

I landed one September morn,  
The birds all sang "Tra-li=li-li"  
The day had just begun to dawn,  
And waken Sunny Italy.

I travelled up the Eastern coast,  
And everything went swimmingly,  
And I began to make the most  
Of lumps of Sunny Italy.

The sun shone less, the rain fell oft,  
The black clouds gathered threateningly,  
The mud was thick, the ground was soft,  
In - O yes, SUNNY Italy.

My clothes were wet and so was I,  
Indeed, I thought quite nastily,  
Of him who wrote this blasted lie,  
And called this Sunny Italy.

The Land was white, the snow was deep,  
The wind howled then so bitterly,  
It even was too cold to sleep,  
Outside, in Sunny Italy,

And more and more my thoughts went thus,  
To he who wrote so liberally,  
And had the awful nerve to pen  
“Go south to Sunny Italy”.

So if by heck I catch that crook,  
I’ll break his neck so thoroughly,  
He’ll never write another book,  
And call it “Sunny Italy”.

Cpl. Brewer.  
“S” Company

skis to try and locate the men. “They failed to do so, as wind had caused the snow to cover the tracks they had made.” Four of the men had managed to take shelter on a farm, but the patrol leader died from exposure. “He was found sitting in a drift, and tracks indicated that he had crawled the last two or three kilometres before he died.”<sup>29</sup> There were many cases of frostbite, and of the 108 cases of exposure in 78<sup>th</sup> Division, five men died.<sup>30</sup>

In February 78<sup>th</sup> Division moved over to the Fifth Army front to join the New Zealand Corps on the second assault on Cassino. Although they had come down from the bad weather in the mountains there was no respite from the miserable conditions. Instead of snow, they now had to contend with rain. “The Division trained and exercised in a dreary landscape of pools and semi-liquid quagmires.”<sup>31</sup> As Table 2.8 (Chapter II) shows, 78<sup>th</sup> Division suffered 81 desertions at the beginning of the year, when they holding defensive positions in the mountains, where any kind of movement was difficult. The figure rose sharply to 207 when they left the mountains to start training: their “fight or flight” imperative came into play as soon as it was physically feasible.

Soldiers manning the front line at Cassino spent days, sometimes weeks, in water-filled slit trenches and the infantrymen’s ankle-high boots provided very little protection against cold injuries such as trench foot.<sup>32</sup> One soldier from the East Surreys remembers manning a trench close to the River Rapido:

We remained near the trench for several days, sometimes occupying it by night only, sometimes for twenty-four hours at a time. It was below water level and we were constantly standing in water. My mate Fred was very annoyed at this

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ray, *Algiers to Austria*, p. 110

<sup>31</sup> Ford, *Battleaxe Division*, p. 144

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *Combat Nurse*, pp. 173-4

and one night slipped away down to the river and took the boots off a dead German. He wore these every time we had to stay in the trench. I thought I would like a pair and so I too went down to the river with him and tried to get the boots off a dead German. With Fred holding the body down with his foot I tugged the first boot off, but when I came to get the second I pulled the whole leg off at the thigh. Fred took the jacket off the German and wrapped it around the thigh and held it tightly while I successfully wrenched the boot off the dead soldier's foot. We always wore these boots when in trenches, but our own army boots at all other times. Wearing enemy kit was definitely not allowed.<sup>33</sup>

One soldier with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, which arrived at Cassino late February, found himself at the beginning of March taking over positions in the mountains. He described his journey up the mountain and the conditions there thus:

We commenced the long climb up into the mountains. The only paths were goat tracks, which twisted and writhed agonisingly up and across the mountain slopes. It seemed we marched miles just to make a few hundred yards upward progress. Higher and higher we climbed, despite the intense cold, very soon we were bathed in sweat, my legs ached cruelly from the effort involved.

Our positions were on Mount Ornito, they consisted of a chain of sangars strung across the mountainside just below the peak. The sangars were covered by groundsheets to keep out the snow.

It was bitterly cold on the mountain, blizzards were frequent, icy winds blew the snow through unprotected openings in the sangars. No hot meals could be brought to us, our diet consisted mainly of frozen bully and hard tack biscuits. We wore leather jerkins over our great-coats and, to further help us keep out the intense cold, we wrapped layers of sandbags around our legs. These we tied into place using strips of the same material.<sup>34</sup>

The Welsh Guards, too, suffered through the appalling conditions on Monte Ornito:

The bitter cold at the top, with snow, sleet, and rain, and only one blanket, later two, caused many frostbite and exposure casualties.<sup>35</sup>

A deep-sided valley above Cairo village known as the Bowl, whose steep sides offered some shelter from the heights of Monte Cassino, was the nearest any battalion could get to enemy-held positions in the mountains around the Cassino Monastery. The infantry would

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<sup>33</sup> Ford, *Battleaxe Division*, p. 144

<sup>34</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, p. 71

climb up to the Bowl from San Michele, a divisional forward dump area, followed by pack mules carrying in their kit, and concentrate there before going to the rocky outcrops held by the Allies. Bn HQ was located in the Bowl, and supplies were off-loaded there. On one side these positions were overlooked by the Monastery 800 yards away; behind were the enemy-held heights of Monte Cairo and ahead of them was a German-held ridge on which some of its defenders were just 90 yards from the British infantry. The men lived in stone-built sangars since it was impossible to dig slit trenches in the stony ground. Any daylight movement in the forward areas was out of the question. It was, according to Fred Majdalany, “a cemetery for the living”.<sup>36</sup> The hovel where he had his HQ:

consisted of two crumbly ground-floor ‘rooms’. The upper part of the dwelling – which may once have belonged to a not-too-house-proud shepherd – had been reduced to a decaying mass of rubble and battle wreckage. We set up our command post in one of the lower rooms.

Eight of us lived in this room, together with large numbers of centipedes and other crawling things. These had a disconcerting habit of dropping from the gaps between the damp, sagging planks which precariously comprised our ceiling. Some of the centipedes were over three inches long and were not the least unpleasant feature of the residence. Shells are not nice, but you can hear them coming.<sup>37</sup>

Following the rise in desertion during the winter months, the second peak occurred towards the end of the Cassino and Anzio battles in May and June. Again, the principal causes were morale-degrading living conditions and the strain of long periods of static warfare. One soldier, old enough to remember the First World War, said Cassino “looked like Passchendaele.”<sup>38</sup> The suffering of the fighting troops at Cassino “cannot be overstated,” wrote John Ellis.<sup>39</sup> Conditions for the battalions holding Cassino town were no better than

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<sup>35</sup> NA WO 170/1347 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for February 1944 Appendix

<sup>36</sup> Majdalany, *The Monastery*, p. 17

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Hapgood and Richardson, *Monte Cassino*, p. 147

<sup>39</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, p.xiv

for those in the surrounding mountains. "All personnel in Cassino were rationed to half a gallon of water per day," recorded one battalion diary.<sup>40</sup> Cassino was held by three battalions, with a further battalion in the area of the Station.<sup>41</sup> One battalion HQ was located in the Cathedral Crypt, hundreds of tons of rubble on top making it capable of withstanding hits, even by 210mm shells, which landed on it from time to time. The men lived in sangars, in most cases inside, but in some cases outside, ruined buildings in the town. They were more or less immune from mortar and to a large extent, from shellfire, but the forward troops were in very cramped conditions in close proximity to the enemy, with very limited fields of view, and liable at any moment to become out of communication with the rear. Worst of all, they were, to all intents and purposes, isolated as far as help by crossfire from neighbouring posts was concerned. The reason for this were the enormous piles of rubble which effectively blocked views and interfered with fields of fire. The town was also, literally, pocked with shell and bomb craters, some of them as much as 40 feet across and with six or seven feet of water in them. The shell holes had one advantage; they supplied water which, after chlorination, could be used for washing. But water supply shell-holes had to be carefully distinguished from the ones which after dark received the contents of the refuse bins and sanitary buckets.<sup>42</sup>

One soldier said: "The rats were revolting. They were so fat. We know they were gorged on the hundreds of bodies nobody could reach."<sup>43</sup> Another commented on the "nauseating and unbearable stench" of Cassino, made worse by the smoke-shells the Allies fired from

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<sup>40</sup> NA WO 170/1419 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for May 1944

<sup>41</sup> NA WO 170/1366 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Black Watch War Diary for April 1944

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, p. 208

morning until dusk.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that the number of dead bodies lying around Cassino was exaggerated: “The town was supposed to be full of putrefying bodies, but we did not experience as much trouble as was expected, but a supply of disinfectants and bleach was laid on in case of need.”<sup>45</sup>

78th Division’s time at Cassino town was described as “perhaps the dreariest and unhappiest in its history, for the losses and the hardships it had suffered had been – it seemed – to no purpose. No victory had crowned its sufferings, and men had been lost not in a major battle but in nameless and apparently purposeless forays.”<sup>46</sup> General Leese, Commander Eighth Army, pointed out that 78<sup>th</sup> Division “have been driven a little beyond bursting point,” but added: “The spirit of the Division is high.”<sup>47</sup> Desertion figures bear this out: the number of 78<sup>th</sup> Division absentees and deserters from March 24<sup>th</sup>-June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1944 were 289, which, averaging out at 32 per battalion, is at the lower end of Wigram’s suggested general level of absenteeism.

Conditions at Anzio were just as unendurable as at Cassino. The weather in the bridgehead for the first two months was appalling. At Anzio the summer temperatures could reach over 100 degrees of stifling heat, but in winter the “steady, driving, sleeting rain which permeated everywhere” turned the landscape – most of it former marshland – into a quagmire.<sup>48</sup> The Grenadier Guards’ diary recorded that “the mud on even the main supply

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<sup>44</sup> Lee Harvey, *D-Day Dodgers*, p. 87

<sup>45</sup> NA WO 170/1366 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Black Watch War Diary for April 1944

<sup>46</sup> Ray, *Algiers to Austria*, pp. 20-21

<sup>47</sup> NA WO 216/168 Leese Papers Letter to Major-General Kennedy at the War Office, 16 April 1944.

<sup>48</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 50



track to the fun areas was in places knee deep.”<sup>49</sup> The coldest winter in years was keenly felt in the bridgehead where slit trenches were filled with freezing water. It was impossible to dig down more than six inches without coming to water.<sup>50</sup> Even newly-dug graves were half-filled with water before the burials could take place.

The natural trench system of deep ravines, known to the British troops as wadis, had names likened to their shape on the map. Apart from the Fortress there was The Boot (both in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division sector); the Lobster’s Claw, the Starfish, and the Culvert, all three of which were the purview of 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Newcomers could hardly believe that life could carry on in the narrow dug-ins on either side of the gullies. “It was the ever-present squalor and boredom of the life in the wadis, as much as the danger of it, which eventually ‘got men down’.”<sup>51</sup> Major-General Gregson-Ellis, Commander of 5<sup>th</sup> Division, called it “a nauseating bit of country to fight in.”<sup>52</sup>

In the winter of 1944-1945, men in the mountains had to endure not only the freezing cold, but also the mud, and desertion rates peaked at this time. “Conditions were appalling for both men and mules, the mud being very sticky and knee deep in places. A number of men lost one or two boots on the way up.”<sup>53</sup> One battalion recorded:

October 5: Another wet day. Everyone got soaked again. Mobile baths were set up in Castiglione and 25 men from each Coy trudged through the rain, much against their will, to get clean. Since however they have been in their clothes for five days and got completely filthy, this cleaning up process, although maybe unpleasant, was extremely necessary.

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<sup>49</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for February 1944

<sup>50</sup> NA WO 170/1354 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Irish Guards War Diary for March 1944

<sup>51</sup> Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p. 223

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p. 223

<sup>53</sup> NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington’s Regiment War Diary for December 1944

October 6: The rain continued throughout the night and day; slit trenches were falling in everywhere.

October 7: The patrol returned very wet but with no news of the enemy. It commenced to rain heavily and everyone was drenched again.

October 8: Weather was again the chief topic for the day. The rain continued to make life miserable for the men in the trenches – varying from light drizzle to torrential showers. During the whole of the morning there was hardly a minute when it was not raining.<sup>54</sup>

Another battalion diary reported:

October 26: The rain from the previous day persisted during the night and daylight saw no abatement. River beds became torrents with swift currents making even small streams impassable. ... Coy positions had been just below the ridge crest of Monte Spaduro. The ground was clay and some trenches began to fill and flow as water ran down from above and welled up from below. Trenches collapsed, burying equipment, weapons, blankets. New trenches met the same fate as soon as dug, and no material was available for revetting. All coys could do was sit in the mud as the water drenched and soaked them, and no sign of a clearer sky appeared....Many were attended to at the R.A.P. for exposure and sickness.

October 27: The CO the IO visited coys, whose morale was not as low as it might have been after what they had endured. Nevertheless the decline in numbers, mainly due to sickness, but partly due to the occasional shell casualties, and absence, caused increased concern and it was apparent that these conditions would not be endured much longer without wasting away the Bn. Officers and men who had been with the Bn since the African landing in November 1942 describe the conditions as worse than they had previously experienced.<sup>55</sup>

A week of torrential rain at the end of October made the supply problem in the mountains a serious one. The month's rainfall rose from an average of two and a half inches to eleven and a half inches. Bridges all over Italy were washed away and there were quite a number of drownings when trucks, which had been driven into flood waters, were swept away with their drivers.<sup>56</sup> Roads and tracks were in an appalling condition and on two occasions the diversion between Sassoleone and San Apollinare was washed away, making it impossible

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<sup>54</sup> NA WO 170/1348 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for October 1944

<sup>55</sup> NA WO 170/1425 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for October 1944

<sup>56</sup> R. Clarke, *With Alex At War: From the Irrawaddy to the Po 1941-1945* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), p. 181

for even mules to get through.<sup>57</sup> Mules, 30,000 of them, were the saviours of the forward units.<sup>58</sup> The Mule Corps, in terms of manpower and animals, represented the equivalent of more than three divisions.<sup>59</sup> A comment that appeared regularly in battalion diaries was: "Owing to heavy rain during the previous night jeeps were unable to bring supplied forward and mule tpt had again to be resorted to."<sup>60</sup> "These mules were quite invaluable for supplying forward Coys down the atrocious track where no Jeep could hazard a journey. Over some tracks, where the rain did not drain off, the mud was so bad that even the mules used to fall down and drown in it."<sup>61</sup> An unending source of worry to OC HQ Coy was the threat of mutiny by the Italian muleteers, "when their 'vino' failed to turn up, as was often the case."<sup>62</sup> An officer of the Grenadier Guards told a junior officer of the RA: "Don't let on, dear boy, but the war will be won by mules, not by men."<sup>63</sup> As the snow melted, the ground became very muddy and slit trenches filled with water. "Caved-in slit trenches caused conditions for troops manning the forward positions to be very uncomfortable."<sup>64</sup> One young officer recorded in his diary that there was "mud up to knees and much further in places (both mules and men have been suffocated)." He himself sank into the mud up to his small pack and had to be pulled out by members of his platoon who formed a human chain which began on firm ground.<sup>65</sup>

## V

Holding positions in the mountains for long periods, in the winter of 1944-45, without any advance, as 78<sup>th</sup> Division was doing, was detrimental to morale in several ways. Inactivity

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<sup>57</sup> NA WO 170/1433 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for October 1944

<sup>58</sup> Taylor, *Combat Nurse*, p. 183

<sup>59</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 80

<sup>60</sup> NA WO 170/1446 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment War Diary for November 1944

<sup>61</sup> NA WO 204/10425 "The Irish Brigade", Part II, pp. 14-15

<sup>62</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for October 1944

<sup>63</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 82

<sup>64</sup> NA WO 170/5075 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The East Surreys War Diary For February, 1945

itself, with time to consider the unpleasant or unknown something that could happen, was bad for the nerves and therefore bad for morale. The cold sapped energy and patrolling in such conditions was exhausting. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers had been on M. Spaduro so many times since October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, when they first captured the feature, that routine was automatic. "Coys always occupied the same sector to give men an incentive to improve their positions to which they knew they would return. The familiar standing patrols were adopted and the ground immediately to the front of the FDLs was known to all."<sup>66</sup> The Lancashire Fusiliers finally left the Spaduro area on February 12th after a stay of 112 days, one of the longest static periods ever experienced by the battalion.

We had been there the longest winter months of cold and darkness, with long and wearisome standing patrols to undertake and without the attacks and advances which bring success, keep everyone occupied and maintain morale.<sup>67</sup>

For the soldiers who served in the Northern Apennines in the winter of 1944-45, "no words can adequately convey the measure of frustration, the depth of despair, almost of resentment; the experience had to be lived through to be really understood."<sup>68</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that desertion rose to new heights in the winter of 1944-45 (see Appendix IV). 46<sup>th</sup> Division fought in the advance on Forli in October and Lamone at the beginning of December, but by then were a totally spent force, as their desertion figures indicate (see Table 4.7). 78<sup>th</sup> Division and the Guards, meanwhile, were again in the mountains, on Monte Spaduro. Another winter in the mountains, with a great deal of patrolling thrown in, proved too much for many of the men of that division. Patrolling was never popular. At Anzio, patrolling was one of the worst aspects of a soldier's life in the wadis. Penny reported that one corporal in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was facing a court martial for refusing to go

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<sup>65</sup> Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, p. 117

<sup>66</sup> NA WO 170/5033 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for January 1945

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

out on patrol, despite the fact that he was quite happy to man a slit trench in the front line.<sup>69</sup>

Patrolling could result in a slow but steady haemorrhaging of manpower, so most patrols avoided risks. Up on Mount Sole, in the winter of 1944, the Guards had problems with their patrol activities:

Patrols made a terrible noise in the crackling snow and always stood a good chance of being ambushed if their tracks were observed by an enemy patrol. Furthermore, the physical fatigue was tremendous and, owing to the bitter cold, ambush patrols could only remain hidden for a limited time.<sup>70</sup>

Rifleman Bowlby recalled that on the night of January 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> 1945 they had two feet of snow. "Not much other fighting to be done in this, we thought."<sup>71</sup> He was proved right. The first night patrol sent out got stuck up to their necks in drifts and it took them eight hours to make a round trip of three miles.<sup>72</sup> It is not surprising that front-line troops dug in more for warmth than protection from enemy fire, "burrows they were reluctant to leave".<sup>73</sup> Patrols went to ground once out of sight of their own front line, "to return after a plausible interval and report that they had made no contact with the enemy."<sup>74</sup>

In December 1944 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers were in line on Monte Spaduro for four days, which was "a strain". Regular patrols were the order of the day and

An American airman, part of the Rover Joe close support organisation, expressed a desire to participate in a ground patrol and walked over from Bde HQ in the afternoon. After tea he climbed Spaduro and went out with a patrol from 'C' Coy ... He returned with the relief at midnight and climbed down to

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<sup>68</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, p. 212

<sup>69</sup> LHMCA Penny Papers 13/14, p. 2

<sup>70</sup> IWM 91/43/1 Major-General R.H. Whitworth, 24<sup>th</sup> Guards Brigade Operations August 1944 to May 1945: Chapter V, Static Operations in the M. Sole Sector, p. 40

<sup>71</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 204

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp. 204-5

<sup>73</sup> Graham & Bidwell, *Tug of War*, p. 382

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 383

BHQ a wearier and wiser man. Cold, wet, fired at, mortared, he declared on his return that infantry life held no inducements for him.<sup>75</sup>

Patrolling did not just put men at risk of being killed or injured. It added to their exhaustion. One tankman who had been turned into a reluctant infantryman for the winter, when infantry manpower levels were at their lowest, recalled that when he first went up to the front line at the beginning of 1945: "it became clear to us that infantry cannot sit still and enjoy peace and quiet. They must patrol – preferably at night when all good tankmen are abed."<sup>76</sup> No matter how tired the front-line soldier was, he still had to patrol:

While the comparatively uneventful hiatus was being enacted, the awful routine of patrol duty followed by more patrol duty, both by day and by night, continued incessantly. The infantryman on whom all success depended at every stage of every battle was never allowed, once he was committed, to have any rest at all. It did not matter a damn how sick or tired he felt, if he had any life left in him and was capable of shoving one leaden foot in front of another at less than one minute intervals, he had to take his turn. It would be difficult to find any more frightening and soul-destroying activity of the individual, than going on patrol, especially at night.<sup>77</sup>

Army commanders were well aware of the problem. In December 1944 General Sir Sidney Kirkman, Commander of XIII Corps, of which 78<sup>th</sup> Division was then a part, wrote to the Fifth Army Commander, General Mark Clark:

I do not want to over-stress the factor of hardship at this period of the war – we must all be prepared to undergo great privations, and as long as a man is fit to fight he must do so. The fact remains, however, that many of these hills have during the last month been enveloped in mist for long periods. The infantryman has in consequence to stand-to and be on the alert by day as well as by night. In a proportion of the positions movement is impossible in clear weather. The strain of holding forward positions is therefore considerable, and the garrisons invariably go short of sleep, the effect of which is cumulative. Generally speaking it has been found that if units spend more than 10 or 12 days on the top of a hill under present weather conditions, with the inevitably unsatisfactory conditions for feeding, that they tend of become unduly sleepy,

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<sup>75</sup> NA WO 170/1425 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for December 1944

<sup>76</sup> IWM 978/3/1 Captain A.J. Stiebel p. 49

<sup>77</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 37

lethargy and un-alert. These conditions also incidentally affect sickness and absenteeism.<sup>78</sup>

Conditions were no better for the 56<sup>th</sup> Division on the Romagna and the troops were just as tired. On the banks of the Senio, where the German Tenth and Allied Eighth Armies were separated in some place only by the width of the great 25ft high dykes, the Germans had been ordered by Kesselring to maintain an aggressive static line, and told that a live and let live approach would not be tolerated.<sup>79</sup> The Allied infantry therefore had to be continuously alert and, consequently, exhaustion had set in there, too. 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens reported in January that, based on documents they had captured from a German Company HQ, “the Germans estimate that 56 Division, due to heavy casualties and only a few R.A. reinforcements, is not formidable as a fighting unit and will only be used in a holding role.” The diary writer then commented, “Perhaps they’re right.”<sup>80</sup> His opinion was echoed by a 56<sup>th</sup> Division doctor, Tim Elliott, who believed that:

taking a very broad view ... the division was fit for a holding role but not a tough offensive role..... the solid type of soldier, i.e. the serjeant and corporal, was beginning to crack. When questioned by the M.O. they invariably answered that they would willingly go back into the line, but they felt that they would not, at times, be responsible for their actions and they might well find themselves running away. This state of affairs was having an adverse effect on the newly joined reinforcements.<sup>81</sup>

On the Adriatic front, conditions were so bad and “there were cases reported ... of whole companies desertion because of the shocking conditions ...”<sup>82</sup> The Romagna was one vast marsh. The rains of winter – and it rained for days on end – turned the rivers into torrents

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<sup>78</sup> LHCMA (GB99KCLMA) General Sir Sidney Kirkman Letter to Commanding General, Fifth US Army, 23 December 1944

<sup>79</sup> Howarth, *My God Soldiers*, p. 195

<sup>80</sup> NA WO 170/5060 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for January 1945

<sup>81</sup> NA WO 106/3975 Directorate of Military Operations and Military Intelligence, Operations, Italy: Report to GSO1 from Captain Harrison, 30 January 1945

<sup>82</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, Chapter 22, p. 219

in which men drowned.<sup>83</sup> They turned everything else into a quagmire. But, despite all the rain, there was a shortage of palatable drinking water because the streams were so full of mud that the filters of the unit water trailers failed. "Brews of tea, in which the British... soldiers always found solace, were apt to be mugs of mud when they managed to find enough shelter to boil the water."<sup>84</sup> Mud became the dominant factor in everyone's lives. Every decision, remembered one soldier, was governed by it, and nothing could be undertaken without its sanction.

Not all muds were of the same constituency; they ranged from the almost liquid variety to a dense glutinous substance which imposed on man and vehicles alike, the burden of immobility. Man could wade through the semi liquid stuff and vehicles plough through it like a boat through water, bow wave and all, but the other variety, in its most malevolent, adhesive form, could hold its victims, human and mechanical, in a vice like grip, not to be released by mere brute strength or engine power.<sup>85</sup>

At the beginning of January, 1945, Alexander wrote to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff re-iterating that he was "seriously worried about the effects of long periods in the line on British formations at this stage of the war" and included the information, which he had had from General Kirkman, that in 78<sup>th</sup> Division for every man killed or wounded one man went absent.<sup>86</sup> Absenteeism was such a drain on rifle companies by the end of 1944 that all infantry battalions began listing AWOL and desertion figures in their weekly manpower returns. The CIGS's reply, in view of the prevailing opinion that the desertion figures indicated a serious, and permanent, decline in the fighting ability of British troops, is perhaps surprising. "As far as we can estimate the figures seem to be fairly similar to those

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<sup>83</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for October 1944

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 366

<sup>85</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J. B Tomlinson, p. 210

<sup>86</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Letter to CIGS, 4 January 1945



which we suffered from during the similar period of last winter. In that case they should be again due mainly to the winter discomforts than to other causes ...”<sup>87</sup>

The CIGS was proved correct. From a peak in December, both desertion and AWOL in all British infantry battalions began to fall, slowly at first and then more markedly. The army-wide FGCM figures (Figure 4.1) map the downward trend. Given the length of time it took for a deserter to come before the courts, it is reasonable to assume that the decline in desertion was felt first in the front line, and then in the courts. This is borne out by the absentee figures below:

**Table 4.5**  
**Overall Absence Figures (UK troops) – December 1944-February 1945<sup>88</sup>**

	<u>December</u>	<u>January</u>	<u>February</u>
Absent at beginning of month:	1710	1640	1531
Rejoined during month:	1237	1034	867
Reported during month:	1167	925	673
Absent at end of month:	1640	1531	1337

It is impossible to say what percentage of these absentees were from the rifle companies of infantry battalions, but the figures from individual battalions show the same general downward trend:

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, Extracts from letter from CIGS, 11 January 1945

**Table 4.6**  
**AWOL Figures for the period January –February 1945<sup>89</sup>**  
 (based on available information: ‘-’ indicates no figures given)

<u>Battalion:</u>	<u>Week Ending:</u>								
	<u>6 Jan</u>	<u>13 Jan</u>	<u>20 Jan</u>	<u>27 Jan</u>	<u>3 Feb</u>	<u>10 Feb</u>	<u>17 Feb</u>	<u>24 Feb</u>	<u>3 Mar</u>
<u>78<sup>th</sup> Division:</u>									
5 <sup>th</sup> Northants	9	6	4	2	-	2	-	-	-
5 <sup>th</sup> Buffs	15	18	8	3	5	4	3	3	1
6 <sup>th</sup> RWK	18	11	7	9	3	3	2	1	-
<u>Guards:</u>									
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grenadier Guards	6	7	2	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	Nil
<u>56<sup>th</sup> Division</u>									
1 <sup>st</sup> London Scottish	-	-	-	-	4	8	2	1	1
2/7 <sup>th</sup> Queens	-	-	7	4	4	9	5	5	3

## VI

There were other reasons for desertion, apart from length of service and the conditions and length of time in line. Unhappy reinforcements, for example, especially cross-posted men, seem to have been more likely to desert than reinforcements who were returning to their own battalion. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn KOYLI recorded that on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1944 they had had 52 absentees since July 10<sup>th</sup> 1943. Twenty-three of these men were with the battalion on the initial landing in Sicily. All the other men had come from reinforcements received.<sup>90</sup> Unhappy reinforcements also appeared to be the main culprits for AWOL figures in the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards at Anzio. The absentees were all from the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards, disbanded because of a shortage of manpower and merged into the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion. There were as many as 21 absentees in the 5<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Guards. “This was very high for our Bn which had a light crime record,” recorded Sergeant Danger.

<sup>88</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Report for the Quarter Ending 28 February 1945 Appendix “A”

<sup>89</sup> Figures taken from: NA WO 170/5051 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment War Diaries for January & February 1945; NA WO 170/4993 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diaries for January & February 1945; NA WO 170/5022 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diaries for January & February 1945; NA WO 170/4979 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diaries for January & February 1945; NA WO 170/5040 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diaries for January & February 1945 and NA WO 170/5061 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diaries for January & February 1945

A Bn, particularly a Guards Bn is very much a family and had very little contact with other Bns in the Regiment. Once you were a 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn, or a 5<sup>th</sup> Bn, or a 6<sup>th</sup> Bn man, you remained as such permanently and you tended to be quite unfriendly to men of other Bns and you certainly resented transfer.... Whole companies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn were transferred to us complete and it was from these that we had the absentees.<sup>91</sup>

Of the 16 men who went AWOL from the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens on September 25<sup>th</sup> 1944, eight men were from the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn Ox & Bucks, which had just been disbanded and whose men were sent as reinforcements to the Queen's Brigade. The first contingent of Ox & Bucks men, about 80 strong, including two officers, had only arrived at the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>92</sup> The 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens even instituted checking-in procedures for all reinforcements "when the Bn is in action or is likely to be in action". The names of all new arrivals were to be checked against nominal roll in the presence of at least three men, whose names were to be noted on the nominal role as present. "The object of the above scheme is to ensure evidence to be available if desertion should take place."<sup>93</sup>

## VII

Low morale was contagious and one unhappy soldier could adversely influence a whole platoon. At the end of March 1944 a group of 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Seaforth Highlanders refused, when in the field, to go forward when ordered to do so by their officer. They all seem to have been influenced by one man, who reportedly said, when the order was given, "I'm fucked if I'm crossing this open piece of ground."<sup>94</sup> The man in question himself said that he did not go forward because he was not feeling well and thought he was going down with another lapse of malaria. In another FGCM for mutiny, a group of 10 men from the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> NA WO 170/1411 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Diary for April 1944

<sup>91</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 159

<sup>92</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for September 1944

<sup>93</sup> NA WO 170/1466 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for November 1944. Battle Instructions No. 14 Reinforcements – Absentees.

<sup>94</sup> NA WO 71/878 Records of the FGCM for mutiny, 6<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlands, 28-29 May 1944

Duke of Wellington's Rifles refused to proceed on a working party after one soldier said: "I'm not going up the line."<sup>95</sup>

## VIII

The longer the campaign went on, the more war weariness played an increasingly important role in desertion. One Morale Committee report stated that "the troops are in good heart, considering that we are now in the sixth year of war. On the other hand, there is some war-weariness, and in the infantry, the strain of protracted period in the line, without rest and in unpleasant conditions, is finding out the weaker members. This is reflected in the size of the problem of desertion ..."<sup>96</sup> "The war is now getting to a stage when most of the troops had long forgotten what they were fighting for and the Army as a whole was weary and fed up with the whole business," one guardsman recorded in November 1944.<sup>97</sup> An officer worried about the morale of some of his battalion's war-weary desert veterans in view of the number of deserters in Naples at the end of 1944.<sup>98</sup>

The detention cells were crammed to overflowing, mainly with deserters from units in the north who were awaiting trial.... Those locked up here, the ones who had been caught, were only a fraction of the total. The rest were hiding in towns and farmsteads, and the hills – so we were told – were full of them. These were the men who would suffer anything rather than facing the 'line' again. Desertion was not a matter of black and white, and never an easy option. So much depended on the amount of pressure an individual was asked to bear. For many, it had been a long campaign and a harsh winter; and for some this was the limit. A soldier who deserts does so not from simple fear of death or injury, but from a refusal of the body and spirit to face any longer the endless discomfort and racking dread, day after day. Then a sudden ungovernable reflex can drive him in desperation to flee the horror he can endure no more, regardless of the severity and ignominy of the consequences.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> NA WO 71/879 Records of the FGCM for mutiny, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Wellington Rifles, 26-28 May 1944

<sup>96</sup> NA WO 32/15772 The War Office Committee on Morale Report of the Committee Part I, The Army Overseas, Sept-Nov 1944, p. 4

<sup>97</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 253

<sup>98</sup> Elliott, *Esprit de Corps*, p. 81

<sup>99</sup> Craig, *The Broken Plume*, p. 140

Another explanation was offered for why “good” soldiers deserted. “There is no doubt that there does exist a certain underlying current of frustration, of being generally ‘browned off’.... The outstanding reason, without any doubt at all, is absence from home; and the lack of any system of home leave.”<sup>100</sup> Both were the result of the endemic shortage of reinforcements. Some Regular soldiers had served abroad for several years, most had been away from home for over at least a year. Bad news or anxiety about loved ones at home could adversely influence a man’s behaviour, and domestic stress was present in about a third of all absentee/desertion cases.<sup>101</sup> Home worries were introduced in mitigation in some Court Martial proceedings.<sup>102</sup>

## IX

The third question to consider is, who deserted? Sparrow identified the ‘involuntary’ deserter and the ‘deliberate’ deserter. The ‘involuntary’ deserter was a man “whose nerve breaks, a class which includes an infinite variety of types, from the genuine case of complete ‘shell-shock’ to the man whose real trouble is weakness of will. Many of these deserters would welcome ‘a second chance’, although it may be questioned how they would act if they were given it.” The Judge Advocate General’s staff believed that the proportion of ‘deliberate’ to ‘involuntary’ deserters was 1:10.<sup>103</sup> Brigadier Scott-Elliot, CO of 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Anzio, on the other hand, concluded from his experiences at Anzio, that 20% of all deserters were made up of what he termed “whole skinners”. “These are men who are quite determined not to risk life or limb. They are entirely selfish.”<sup>104</sup> According to him,

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<sup>100</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, 1943 December-1945 March. Subject: Morale – British Troops, 25 February 1944, p. 1

<sup>101</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychology*, p. 124

<sup>102</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 71/866, when the defence of an infantryman cited home worries and the effects of heavy mortar fire in mitigation against a charge of cowardice.

<sup>103</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, 1943 December-1945 March, Notes on Tour of Italy: June-July 1944, compiled by Lt. Col. J. Sparrow, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> LHCMA Scott-Elliot Papers, “The 5<sup>th</sup> Casualty: Battle Absentees”, p. 2

men recently joining a unit, put into battle too quickly, and not knowing their leaders and commanders accounted for 10% of absentees; men put back into battle from hospital too quickly 4%; good men worn thin 10%; while the majority, 56%, were men with low standards or weak characters.<sup>105</sup>

In June 1944 Major-General Sir Brian Robertson, Chief Administrative Officer, HQ Allied Armies in Italy, in a Memorandum on Desertion, classified deserters as (a) Cowards; (b) Men whose nerve has cracked under strain and (c) Rogues. The Adjutant General, Sir Ronald Adam, felt that the claim that this was the only honest division of deserters was a very rough classification indeed. "It is not quite clear how the writer distinguishes between (a) cowards and (b) men whose nerve has cracked under strain. Presumably the only distinction which can be made is that the former have cracked sooner than the others." He went on:

I feel that the writer considers that the only strain under which a man can excusably crack is the strain of battle. This may be sound ethics, but I do not think it is true in practice. If a man goes into battle for the first time with a heavy load of domestic anxiety and lack of confidence in his leaders he may well crack at an early stage.

The basic assumption in this paper is that the only causes of desertion are either cowardice, battle strain or roguery. I have not the slightest doubt that a very considerable proportion of A.W.O.L. and even of desertion can be traced to men bring just "fed up". Indeed, there are cases where such men became fed up primarily because of lack of action against the enemy and not as a result of contact with the enemy. It is not uncommon for men who have been A.W.O.L. to surrender themselves voluntarily as soon as they have reason to believe that action is imminent.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid

## X

Most deserters were ‘involuntary’ deserters, men who had simply come to the end of their tether. This was particularly prevalent towards the end of the campaign:

That was at the time that infantry were like that – there were lads who’d been right up Italy, they’d had a belly full [sic] of that and at the first real thump a lot of them used to disappear.<sup>107</sup>

Enemy action could be an immediate spur to desertion. Alex Bowlby recalled his feelings when a bomb landed near him:

Before the shock hit me, in the split-second between the blast and my reaction to it, I saw two different shades of red – the dark-red of disintegrating metal, the funnel of flame opening round it. Then I went to bits myself. The reds of the explosion were clamped on my retina. For several minutes I could see nothing. This plus the blast plus the fact that we couldn’t dig in reduced me to jelly. Desert. Desert. The next time, I promised myself. The next time I will. Before the attack. A court-martial’s better than this. I steadier myself by scratching the ground with my entrenching tool.<sup>108</sup>

Towards the end of the campaign, many of the men who deserted in action seem to have done so because, at that moment in time, they could do nothing else. Two members of the 16<sup>th</sup> Bn DLI, who had been with the battalion since 1943, and both of whom had excellent records, were convicted of cowardice by FGCM in October 1944 after leaving the front line for about 30 hours. One had been wounded earlier in the year, and for a month before he committed the offence he took part in some very heavy fighting and endured a great deal of heavy shelling, which caused a considerable number of casualties in his company. The other man, a corporal, had, just before the offence, been completely buried with his platoon sergeant beneath the debris of a house hit by shells. The platoon sergeant was killed and

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<sup>106</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Morale, Welfare & Discipline. Comments on Memorandum by the Adjutant General, 27 June 1944

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Hart, *The Heat of Battle*, p. 142

<sup>108</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, pp. 182-3

## POETS CORNER

(For Capts J.R. Nixon and B.J. Wilkinson  
and the rest at home sweet home!)

=====

IF !!

(After Rudyard Kipling)

If you can keep yourself free from going crackers  
At all the things you are told to do:

When Hitler sends along his air attackers  
With squibs and bombs to try and frighten you:

If you can hear the hellish banshee warning  
Without that sinking feeling in your breast:

If you can sleep in dug-outs till the morning  
And never feel you ought to have more rest:

If you can laugh at every black-out stumble  
Nor murmur when you cannot find a pub:

If you can eat your rations and not grumble  
About the wicked price you pay for grub:

If you can keep depression down to zero  
And view it all as just a bit of fun:

Then, sir, you'll be a bloody hero  
And what's more, you'll be the only one!

Anon



the corporal himself was very badly shaken.<sup>109</sup> Both returned to their unit of their own accord. The poet Vernon Scannell, who was himself a deserter, believed that no deterrent could prevent such a man from deserting:

I think that the man who is going to desert in action is going to do it anyway because he is not thinking beyond that isolated moment of pure abject terror. It is not a rational act. He's like an animal scuttling for safety; it's almost reflex.<sup>110</sup>

Men who left the front line usually stayed in the battalion area, either heading for the medical tent or 'B' Echelon, and would then be dealt with either at battalion level or by FGCM. Others tried to avoid even going up to the front line to start with. As battalions were sent up to the front there were Regimental Policemen on the starting line. Would-be battle absentees

would go up and would belt one of them straight on the chin, flatten him. The object of the exercise was to go in the nick because it was better in there than up there. But they got wise to that so that what they used to do was bundle him up in the truck and get him up there, and then, when he came out, the first day he was on rest, try him and then bang him in the nick for the period you were out. All these little things happened with everybody - all units - any excuse to get out of going back. Some again, genuinely frightened, had enough, were weary, and should have been relieved, and they would try anything to get out of going back.<sup>111</sup>

There were also incidents of what might be called "passive" desertion, deliberately allowing oneself to be taken prisoner. At Salerno, for instance, in one sector, on D-Day + 2, troops in a section position saw armed figures coming towards them through the trees of an orchard. Before a shot was fired, several of the soldiers rose from their trenches and put their hands up. The newcomers turned out to be Americans.<sup>112</sup> At Anzio, too, the nature of

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<sup>109</sup> Respectively NA WO 71/933 and NA WO 71/935

<sup>110</sup> Holden, *Shell Shock*, p. 100

<sup>111</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16593 T. Chadwick, Reel 8

<sup>112</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 136.

the fighting, with plenty of close contact and patrolling, allowed passive desertion. Penney complained there were “too many cases of easy surrender to the enemy.”<sup>113</sup> In February 1944 a company of the 1st Bn London Scottish reported that there were approximately 100 enemy soldiers coming out of the wood in front of their position waving a white flag. As the flag-bearers came closer it was discovered that they were British.<sup>114</sup> On another occasion some British soldiers, prisoners of the Germans, shouted at their colleagues that the situation was hopeless and they’d better surrender too.<sup>115</sup> Most of the British PoW, however, were captured against their will and they returned to their own lines whenever they could, bringing back valuable information with them.<sup>116</sup>

## XI

There were, however, men who deserted with the express intent of avoiding front-line duty. The ‘deliberate’ deserter, according to Lt.-Col. Sparrow, was a man “who frankly prefers three years PS, served in safety, suspended after six months, and terminated (as he confidently expects) by an amnesty, to the dangers of the line.”<sup>117</sup> Towards the start of the 1944 winter, one soldier recalled:

The ‘grapevine’ reported that there were thirty thousand men in Italy ‘on the trot’. I could well believe it. A rifleman on leave had gone back to Regello. When he’s offered an Italian a cigarette the man said ‘Thanks, mate. I’ll ‘ave the packet.’ He was a deserter from ‘C’ Company. I wondered what the numbers would be when the weather broke.<sup>118</sup>

Deserters who were serious members of the ‘Trotters’ Union’ often had criminal records.

An RAOC serviceman, stationed near Naples, remembered the gangs of deserters who

<sup>113</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 13/5, p. 2

<sup>114</sup> NA WO 170/1434 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish Rifles War Diary for February 1944

<sup>115</sup> Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p. 122

<sup>116</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 170/1373 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Cameronians War Diary for June 1944 Report by an Escaped British PoW of his Interrogation by Germans

<sup>117</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, 1943 December-1945 March, Notes on Tour of Italy: June-July 1944, compiled by Lt. Col. J. Sparrow, p. 3.

operated in the city, some based in what appeared to be official transit camps for “special units”. From these locations they preyed particularly on other soldiers.

.....NCO deserters knew or learned the ropes very quickly. It takes one to know one and they would chat to soldiers who they suspected to be deserters. It would take some time before the squaddy would admit this; he was afraid that these men might be from the SIB. When he was convinced he would go back to their so-called transit camp. As long as there was a pukka RP guard on the gate it all looked legal from the outside. Inside the Union members would organize thefts from individual soldiers – this used to be called “rolling a guy” – it is called mugging today. Sometimes a couple of “union members” would pretend to be military police and would flag a truck down which they knew to be carrying NAAFI goods. The union members lived the life of Reilly; high-jacking lorries, mugging. They were up to all sorts of tricks. They were on velvet. One of them, so the story goes, ran a string of girls in Rome. They worked in the Colosseum and he used to do a twice weekly journey to collect the money and to dish out rewards and punishment. From what I heard that is how the Trotters’ Union transit camp came unstuck. One of the girls became jealous and shopped the ponce. When he was interrogated he spilled the beans but when the SIB got to the Transit Camp only the guard on the gate was there.<sup>119</sup>

Civilians could also be the victims of such deserters. In October 1944, a gang of them assaulted some villagers and molested the women when they could not find anything lootable. “The women were evidently spared from outright rape by the fear many of our soldiers share of contracting syphilis.”<sup>120</sup>

In the late summer of 1944, one group of American and British deserters “had had for some time in their possession 3-ton lorries, a 15 cwt truck and with two despatch outriders on motor bicycles.... had been running grain and olive oil across the country.... What appeared even more incredible was that the group operating this particular enterprise included within it one or two German deserters.”<sup>121</sup> Others took to the hills and lived as

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<sup>118</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 177

<sup>119</sup> Lucas, *The British Soldier*, p. 38

<sup>120</sup> Lewis, *Naples '44*, p. 42.

<sup>121</sup> IWM 81/5/1 N.J. Friskney, Chapter VI, The Black Market, V/3

brigands. A group of deserters known as the 'Free English' enjoyed their freedom for a few weeks, but the bitterly cold winter proved too much for them and they gave themselves up to Colonel Watts of No. 31 Field Surgical unit.<sup>122</sup>

As the war moved north, so too did the criminal element. It was reported that in October 1944 gangs of allied deserters were operating in Rome, but that strong action by Allied Military Police had led to the apprehension of a number of members of these gangs.<sup>123</sup> The Red Caps used to raid the Alexander Serviceman's Club in Rome looking for deserters. They arrived in vans equipped with cages for the apprehended absentees.<sup>124</sup> There was a drive, starting September 11<sup>th</sup> for a month, against the deserters by the provost personnel of all branches of the services, RN, RAF and Army, together with Dominion and Allied Provost, civil police, Intelligence Branch officers and garrison troops.<sup>125</sup> The number of absentees apprehended or surrendered in the L of C area between September 9<sup>th</sup> and November 10<sup>th</sup> 1944 was 2,845.<sup>126</sup>

## XII

All indications are that ORs absented themselves far more readily than officers or NCOs.

One explanation given was:

Very few officers and serjeants failed in battle while many men did. Why was this so? There are many reasons, but the main ones are as follows:-

- a. They had responsibilities for men under them and had more to do and think about
- b. They had a stronger moral sense and were more keenly aware of what was expected of them

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<sup>122</sup> Taylor, *Combat Nurse*, pp. 178-9

<sup>123</sup> NA WO 32/15772 The War Office Committee on Morale Report of the Committee, Part I, The Army Overseas, Sep-Nov 1944, p. 7

<sup>124</sup> IWM Sound Archives 17621 W. Virr, Reel 14

<sup>125</sup> NA WO 204/6714 Allied Forces, Mediterranean Theatre, Military Headquarters Papers. Discipline: Deserters and Absentees. Plan for Special Drive Against Absentees and Deserters, 24 August 1944

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, Discipline: Deserters and Absentees Letter from the Major General, DAG, G-1(Br), 25 November 1944

- c. They were by character and mental training more self-controlled, more able to squash their fears and more able to force themselves to do what they know to be right.<sup>127</sup>

This does not mean that officers and NCOs were immune to fear or war weariness. In one case, at the Gothic Line, a Company Commander went missing. He had gone back to HQ to get the orders for an attack:

but as H-Hour approached he had still not returned. HQ kept radioing and asking if he was back yet, and then had to ring through very basic battle plans so that the junior officers could carry out the attack. The CO never re-appeared. He had a complete breakdown - he just chickened out, he was found in a ditch. I couldn't have been battle fatigue, he hadn't been in enough ... he went and hid in a ditch. He was quietly sent home.<sup>128</sup>

NCOs, like all soldiers, felt the strain of prolonged action. At Gemmano, a particularly nasty part of the Gothic Line:

the strength of our unit was much depleted and morale was dropping. The majority of the survivors had seen action in Tunisia and in Italy south of Rome. Some had served in France and lived through Dunkirk. A feeling grew among the veterans that their chances of dying of old age were pretty slim. They had seen mates wounded and killed. Years later I learnt from a well liked N.C.O. that he had talked despairingly of running away with others in his company. We had all had enough.<sup>129</sup>

### XIII

The fourth question posed at the beginning of the chapter was whether Territorial divisions suffered a higher desertion rate than Regular Army divisions. As can be seen from Table 4.8, the level of desertion, at the time when desertion was at its peak, does appear to be lower for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Division, the Regular divisions. The total Desertion and Absentee figures for the five months, August to December, during the Gothic Line Assault, for each infantry division were as follows:

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<sup>127</sup> LHCMA Brigadier Scott-Eliot, *The 5<sup>th</sup> Casualty, Battle Absentees*, pp. 3-4

<sup>128</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13878 Lt.-Col. R. Collins, Reel 11

<sup>129</sup> IWM 99/85/1 N. Wray, "Infantry Man! Why Me?", p. 175

**Table 4.7**  
**Table of Desertion/Absentee rate , by formation,**  
**produced by Historian of 8<sup>th</sup> Army's 'A' Branch**  
**August-December 1944<sup>130</sup>**

<u>Division:</u>	<u>No. of AWOL/Deserters</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Division:	626
4 <sup>th</sup> Division:	664
46 <sup>th</sup> Division:	1,059
56 <sup>th</sup> Division:	990
78 <sup>th</sup> Division	927 (October, November and December only)
1 <sup>st</sup> Guards Brigade:	81
24 <sup>th</sup> Guards Brigade:	102

A closer examination of the battalion figures for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Divisions, however, would indicate that the situation was not as simple as it at first appears:

**Figure 4.8**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Division and 78<sup>th</sup> Division battalion Desertion Figures for December 1944<sup>131</sup>**

<u>1<sup>st</sup> Division Desertion Figures for December 1944:</u>					
<u>Battalion:</u>	<u>2/12</u>	<u>9/12</u>	<u>16/12</u>	<u>23/12</u>	<u>30/12</u>
6 <sup>th</sup> Gordon Highlanders:	-	5	5	2	3
2 <sup>nd</sup> N. Staffs:	4	-	14	1	1
1 <sup>st</sup> Loyal:	6	5	5	Nil	Nil
1 <sup>st</sup> DWR:	14	16	-	14	5
2 <sup>nd</sup> Sherwood Foresters:	5	9	4	3	2
<u>78<sup>th</sup> Division Desertion Figures for December 1944:</u>					
<u>Battalion:</u>	<u>2/12</u>	<u>9/12</u>	<u>16/12</u>	<u>23/12</u>	<u>30/12</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> E. Surreys	29	20	15	12	12
5 <sup>th</sup> Northants	19	19	20	26	15
8 <sup>th</sup> A & SH:	3	10	6	6	7
5 <sup>th</sup> Buffs	12	10	9	12	16
6 <sup>th</sup> RWK:	-	8	20	12	16
2 <sup>nd</sup> LIR:	2	11	-	3	1

In 1<sup>st</sup> Division the 6<sup>th</sup> Gordon Highlanders was a Territorial Army unit, but it had the lowest figures, and in 78<sup>th</sup> Division the 1<sup>st</sup> East Surreys, which was a Regular unit, suffered the second highest absentee rate in the Division. There was thus no clear relationship between

<sup>130</sup> Jackson, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 376

<sup>131</sup> Figures taken from the December War Diaries of the following battalions: NA WO 170/1394 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Gordon Highlanders; NA WO 170/1487 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The North Staffordshire Regiment; NA WO 170/1429 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Loyal Regiment; NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment; NA WO 170/1475 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters; NA WO 170/1484 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The East Surrey Regiment; NA WO 170/1446 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment; NA WO 170/1357 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders; NA WO 170/1369 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs; NA WO 170/1422 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents and NA WO 170/1433 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles

whether a unit was a Regular or Territorial Army unit and the propensity of its members to desert.

The Guards Brigades were less than a quarter of the size of a division. However, assuming that the desertion/AWOL rate was four times higher than given in Table 4.7, i.e. 324 and 408 for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 24th Guards Brigades respectively, to bring them in line with a Division, what does stand out is the low desertion/AWOL rate of these formations, which could only be reinforced with guardsmen. A Guards NCO believed that most Guards deserters were “simply psychological cases and deserted simply because they could stand no more. Others were simply interested in sex and both categories were living with, and as, Italians simply to escape front line duty.” He added: “Apart from one instance, due mainly to poor leadership, I do not think that ours [Guards] were deserters in the true sense. They were mostly looking for amusement, and sex. One man deserted time after time but he was usually found shacked up with some woman without much trouble. Because he did a good job, and was valuable to the Bn, he was never punished very severely.”<sup>132</sup>

#### XIV

In general, soldiers tended not to go AWOL or desert in the midst of battle.<sup>133</sup> At Anzio, for instance, the desertion rate was not high overall. But this might well have been due to limited opportunities. The Military Police did their best to ensure that absentees and deserters did not embark on craft leaving Anzio quay, and there were also military police on the look out for deserters at the port of disembarkation.<sup>134</sup> There were very few hiding places in the beachhead: most deserters hid in Padiglione Wood, which was no safer than

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<sup>132</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, pp.254-5

<sup>133</sup> Morris, *Circles of Hell*, p. 399

<sup>134</sup> NA WO 204/6713 Discipline: Deserters & Absentees Letter from Lt.-Col., DPM, 9 March 1944

any where else in the beachhead. 1<sup>st</sup> Division Military Police made a determined sweep for absentees in April: they rounded up eight on April 14<sup>th</sup>, seven on April 15<sup>th</sup>, three on April 16<sup>th</sup> and then the drive intensified, with further patrols in “scruff”, although no further apprehensions are recorded.<sup>135</sup> The success of keeping deserters within the beachhead is probably best signalled by the fact that when it was learnt that 56<sup>th</sup> Division were leaving Anzio a cage had to be set up and a guard maintained on the large number of deserters and absentees “recently coming to hand.”<sup>136</sup> The reputation of Hellhole Anzio was so pervasive that men deserted on the news they were headed that way. One Wiltshire Regiment soldier, who had in fact “done a runner” when the battalion was fighting on the east coast of Italy, was picked up just before the Wilts went to Anzio.

He was in a very recalcitrant mood and I said “what are we going to do with this chap? He’s got to go with us.” So when we were going to get up to the landing craft, my platoon sergeant said “he won’t come out of the room.” He said “I’m not going to go there, Sir. I’m not going to Anzio. You’ll have to carry me on the truck,” he said. So he was put on the truck, put on the ship. He was carried ashore – or assisted to wade ashore. After he had been up in Anzio for a couple of days he was a changed man and the charge was withdrawn.<sup>137</sup>

Most desertions occurred when the men were out of the line, usually on rest periods or day trips to Florence, Rome and other approved towns, when they found reasons for not returning to their units. They usually surrendered to the CMP once their money had run out. One deserter, for instance, hitchhiked from his regiment to Taranto and while he was there he bought most of his meals from restaurants. He spent the nights with troops in various camps in the neighbourhood and told his Commanding Officer later that quite a lot

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<sup>135</sup> NA WO 170/396 1<sup>st</sup> Division Provost Comany War Diary for April 1944

<sup>136</sup> NA WO 170/494 56<sup>th</sup> Division Provost Company War Diary for March 1944

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Brigadier Roden (August 2001), IO of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Wiltshire Regiment at Anzio



of absentees did that. When he had exhausted his funds he surrendered to the CMP.<sup>138</sup> As the campaign continued, the need to give soldiers time away from their fighting duties for rest and recreation, and the rising absenteeism when they were away from the front, forced battalion commanders to become more stringent in their approach to the problem. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn DWR pointed out in September 1944 that:

- ◆ During the present period out of the line, the number of personnel, NCOs and ORs, who have failed to catch returning leave tpt from Florence, has been very much too high
- ◆ Up to now these cases have been dealt with leniently
- ◆ In future, however, a very serious view will be taken of any cases of absence and they will be dealt with severely
- ◆ Inability to find the car park will NOT be accepted as an excuse.<sup>139</sup>

## XV

The final area of investigation posited was what the soldiers themselves felt about deserters. Soldiers seem to have had varying attitudes towards absentees, depending on the circumstances. Men who deserted to the enemy – or tried to – were treated with contempt at the very least. In February 1945, according to one (unsubstantiated) personal diary entry, a Guardsman did just that:

This Guardsman suddenly leapt out of his slit trench and ran towards the enemy, unarmed. This fact was immediately reported through the chain of command and on reaching [the Colonel] he ordered not only the Battalion DF to bear down on the spot where it might be assumed the deserting Guardsman would be crossing, but the whole DF of the Division and any other back-up that could be demanded. I was able to listen in to all this on my own wireless set which suddenly became monopolized by the Commanding Officer shouting, 'Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!'<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> NA WO 204/6713 Letter from the Queen's Own Yorkshire Dragoons to Rear HQ Fifth Army, 12 May 1944

<sup>139</sup> NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment War Diary for September 1944 Battalion Orders 25 September 44

<sup>140</sup> Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, p. 116

The writer thought the Guardsman must be temporarily insane. The Commanding Officer's mental state might also be questioned. It later emerged, when the guardsman was picked up by Military Police in Rome, that he had been accused by his comrades of having stolen some of their kit and had been assured, in consequence, that there could be an accident in the front line.<sup>141</sup> He apparently feared his comrades more than the Germans. In another case, when several men from the Fusiliers deserted, taking a three-tonner full of food and petrol with them, the initial reaction of most of the remaining men was to laugh, except for one, Baker:

When Rifleman Cooper shouted 'Good luck!' Baker snapped his head off.  
 'Turn it up, Titch,' said Cooper defensively. 'If they've 'ad enough now's the time to pack it in.'  
 'We'd be well there if everyone said that!'  
 'Sammy's right, said Phillips. 'Better it 'appens now than in the Line.'  
 'Better it 'appens nowhere!' said Baker.<sup>142</sup>

Most front-line infantrymen, however, seem to have taken absenteeism philosophically. The reason men deserted was that they were "frightened, only one reason, a man has had enough ... and believe me, if you are under shell fire and it's near hand, you've got lads that can't stand it. They are not entirely to blame ...."<sup>143</sup>

The Army, understandably enough, took a different view.

Do men realise the appalling gravity and consequences of this offence? To give a very mild analogy – what would the Wembley crowd think of – or do to – a man who deliberately, in a Cup Final, scored goals against his own side? Magnify this ten thousand times and you don't begin to approach the enormity of this crime, whereby the lives of comrades, the safety and security of wives, parents, families and relatives, the very existence of Great Britain with all its future before it, are jeopardised.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 16

<sup>143</sup> IWM Sound Archives 10421, L. Thornton, Reel 21

<sup>144</sup> LHCMA Penney Papers 13/13 1<sup>st</sup> Division May Day Manifesto: Points for Officers and for their Talks to their Men, 1 May 1944, p. 1

## XVI

Absenteeism and desertion during the first few months of the campaign seem to have been well in line with levels experienced in North Africa. It is clear from the figures in Table 4.8, however, that in the period August–December 1944, the rate of absenteeism per division was far higher than Brigadier Scott-Eliot's suggestion of about 300–400 absentees per Division in any six months. The nature of the fighting in Italy, particularly in the mountains in the winter months, imposed intolerable strains on many over-stretched men, who had been on active service, away from home, for far too long. The shortage of manpower meant that men were even more over-stretched by the end of 1944 than they had been during the previous winter, and the lack of a successful follow-through to the hard fighting at the Gothic Line added yet another element to sap the morale of the hard-pressed troops.

The majority of absentees do not seem to have been motivated by an unwillingness to fight: rather the reverse, in fact. They had experienced too much fighting, too much strain, and most needed a break from the unrelenting pressure of front-line conditions. The British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean, wrote that:

In one corps alone containing four divisions, 1,145 cases of desertion were reported between the beginning of October 1944 and the end of January 1945. Of these, 600 cases occurred in one division [78<sup>th</sup> Division] which had a distinguished fighting record, had been considerably reinforced in the Middle East and on return to Italy went straight into the line and remained there throughout the winter. This division was not engaged in any major operation for four months, but was subjected to the strain and tedium of holding the line in arduous conditions without substantial relief.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943–2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 7

The divisions with the highest desertion rates were the most experienced, and therefore the most hard-worked.<sup>146</sup> This was particularly true of 78<sup>th</sup> Division. Another possible explanation for battalions with excellent reputations as aggressive fighters experiencing high desertion rates could hinge of the type of courage required during the winter months. If courage can be said to have two faces – a masculine face which privileges “the glorious sacrifice, the greater love of the falling-on-the-grenade variety” and a feminine face of endurance - then the soldiers in Italy had to endure both types.<sup>147</sup> Endurance was the key requirement in the Italian winters and often men who excelled in the masculine face of courage lacked its feminine counterpart. In Italy, front line infantrymen were often forced to lie almost motionless during daylight hours in slit trenches or behind stone sangars. Their inability to answer the ‘fight or flight’ imperative proved costly in terms of physical and mental stamina.

## XVII

To sum up, the desertion rate in Italy was undoubtedly manageable at the start of the campaign. Sicily was swiftly taken, and nothing bolsters morale like success. However, as the winter of 1943/44, the worst in living memory, took hold in the mountains, the desertion rate started to rise. A conscript army contains the same cross section of personalities as civil society, with criminals and cowards in both. What worried Army commanders most in Italy was not the number of ‘deliberate’ desertions, but the number of good men who were breaking under the strain of front-line conditions: the weather, the living conditions, static warfare, the noise, and the exhaustion of continuous tension. Any man can break down, and experienced soldiers said they could predict which man would become a liability in the line. “Yes, you could tell ‘em when they came in ... ‘wait till I get

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<sup>146</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and MiddleEast*, Vol VI, Part II, p. 376

out to them Jerries,' it was, 'I'll show you what I'll do to them' ... I'd say 'there's another bomb happy case' and mind I was right."<sup>148</sup> Often it was the most seemingly-confident and belligerent men who broke first.

The desertion rate peaked towards the end of the Cassino/Anzio operations, and then again in the winter of 1944/45. By then, the much-heralded promise of a quick break-through of the Gothic Line had been proved illusory and the prospect of holding a static line for a second winter was just too much for many men. The majority of deserters in the winter of 1944/45, on the face of it, came from the 56<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Divisions, neither of which were Regular formations, but closer examination seems to indicate that by this stage of the war there was little to choose between Regular and Territorial battalions. The esprit de corps of most units had been thoroughly diluted by the number of non-infantry reinforcements and cross-postings. It was only the Guards battalions that retained traditional discipline, since they could only be reinforced by guardsmen, but they, too, were showing increased absentee levels. Deserters were generally not cowards, they were often men from battalions with reputations of very high morale who, because of their willingness to engage the enemy, had been over-fought. When these men could no longer carry on they absented themselves, but were often positive, after a period away from the front-line, about returning to the fray. Despite the rising desertion figures, the majority of infantrymen carried on doing their duty because "our soldiers had grown accustomed to [war] and some of us had forgotten what any other life was like."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Miller, *The Mystery of Courage*, p. 248

<sup>148</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13080 J. Corr, Reel 15

<sup>149</sup> Horsfall, *Throw Our Banners to the Wind*, p. 213

## CHAPTER V

### FORMAL DISCIPLINE

The rising tide of desertions as the army fought its way up Italy provoked two major, lengthy discussions among army commanders: firstly, what measures could be taken to discourage desertion in the first place and, secondly, what to do with soldiers who had already been charged with desertion. Most commanders in the field felt that the usual sentence of three years penal servitude for desertion was inadequate as a deterrent. The death penalty for desertion and cowardice has been abolished, by the Army and Air Force (Annual) Act, in 1930, despite the opposition of the Army Council. Public sentiment, stirred by the outpourings of anti-war sentiment in the 1920s, and outrage at the military death sentences inflicted on First World War soldiers suffering from “shell shock”, had made the abolition a political necessity. But the Army continued to maintain that the threat of a death penalty was required to maintain proper military discipline. In the first half of 1942, when the situation in the Middle East was parlous for the Allies, desertion was considered to be so serious that the then Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, recommended the re-introduction of the death penalty for desertion in the field to the War Office. He had the unanimous support of his army commanders. His reason was that: “no less a deterrent is proved to be required from time to time, not merely in the interests of discipline, but for the conduct of operations in conditions of strain and stress.”<sup>1</sup> The War Cabinet considered Auchinleck’s recommendation in June 1942 and turned it down.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McPherson, *Discipline*, p. 54

The sharp increase in the number of deserters in Italy during the winter of 1943-44 prompted generals once again to seek stronger deterrents. It was Lt.-General Richard McCreery, Commander, 10<sup>th</sup> Corps, who started the ball rolling in a letter to the Lt-General Harding, Alexander's Chief of General Staff, in February 1944. McCreery wrote that "it is clear that there is no chance of the death penalty being reintroduced into the Army Act during the present War, therefore other steps must be taken."<sup>3</sup> McCreery proposed three alternative deterrents. Firstly, in view of the fact that most deserters were not concerned about a prison sentence since they were counting on a general amnesty at the end of the War "on the same lines as took place after the last War," he felt that there should be no general amnesty. Secondly, he moved that all sentences should be carried out in full, unless they were suspended for special reasons. "I am certain," he wrote, "that 75% of all desertions would stop if men knew that the full sentence would have to be undergone". Thirdly, he raised the question of drafting deserters into labour battalions for service in the Pacific in the war against Japan. McCreery also suggested fostering a stronger esprit de corps which "is particularly important when large drafts have to be absorbed quickly during prolonged operations."<sup>4</sup>

Three days after McCreery wrote to Harding, General Alexander, Commander, 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group, wrote to General Sir H. Maitland-Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre, pointing out that there were 450 men, from just three divisions, awaiting trial in Naples for desertion and absence without leave and that a further 25 men

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<sup>2</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Letter to General Sir H. Maitland-Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre, from The Adjutant-General, General Sir Ronald Adam, 7 April 1944

<sup>3</sup> NA WO 204/6712 War Office: Allied Forces, Mediterranean Theatre, Military Headquarters Papers. Discipline: Deserters & Absentees: McCreery to Harding, 15 February 1944

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

were being brought in every day by the Military Police in Naples. He opined: "The abolition of the death penalty for desertion has undoubtedly been a great mistake. I have repeatedly emphasised this; I am convinced that this penalty should be re-introduced."<sup>5</sup>

Alexander finished his letter to Maitland-Wilson by stating:

It is unfair to the men who stay to fight without the aid of their disloyal comrade. It is unfair to the man himself. Most of these deserters are not bad men. Many of them have fought well. They would not have disgraced themselves if they had had the moral stiffening which the prospect of adequate punishment would provide.<sup>6</sup>

Maitland-Wilson took Alexander's concerns to the Adjutant-General, General Sir Ronald Adam, who replied that there was little prospect of the Government considering something they had turned down less than a year previously. "There is no chance of getting the death penalty now. I tried before El Alamein, and was stopped, because it could not be introduced when the British Army was in trouble."<sup>7</sup> In a further communication Adam told Maitland-Wilson: "If anything, the chances of re-introduction have diminished since that date owing to the favourable turn of events which has taken place on all fronts."<sup>8</sup> In any case, faced with the suggestion that the only effective remedy for desertion was to create an ever greater fear – that of execution – Adam stated that while he would not argue against the re-introduction of the death penalty in flagrant cases of inexcusable cowardice where a soldier had endangered the lives of his comrades, the problem, in his view, with the threat of the death penalty was that not all desertion was due to fear, so its re-introduction would not put an immediate stop to 90% of the incidence of desertion, as had been suggested by Major-General Sir Brian Robertson, Chief Administrative Officer at Alexander's

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid Alexander to Maitland-Wilson, 18 February 1944

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Letter to General Sir H. Maitland-Wilson from Sir Ronald Adam, 14 March, 1944

<sup>8</sup> Ibid Letter to Maitland-Wilson from Adam, 7 April 1944



headquarters.<sup>9</sup> In his view the figure would be 50% or less.<sup>10</sup> He also noted that the crime of self-inflicted wounds was almost unknown in Italy and that would certainly re-appear if the death penalty were re-introduced for desertion.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Adam's acknowledgement that there was no possibility of the death penalty being re-introduced for desertion, Major-General Penney, Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Division, wrote in May 1944 in a memo on Absentees and Deserters in the Anzio beachhead that the abolition of the death penalty was partly responsible for the rising desertion figures, "as it has removed the supreme reminder of the obligations of the individual to the community."<sup>12</sup> He added that the offence of desertion "is far too prevalent and the cure is extremely difficult to find."<sup>13</sup> Penney suggested that, at Anzio, a penal settlement could be established in a location "near an active battery or the docks or some similar place exposed to enemy fire" and that "the barbed wire perimeter could be sown with anti-personnel mines ..."<sup>14</sup> The Assistant Deputy Judge Advocate General considered Penney's memo and replied that while he could see no legal objection to the suggestion of a military prison being set up in the Anzio Beachhead, "I do think ... that there may be grave objections to surrounding this prison with anti-personnel mines even if there are notices to show their existence and the prisoners are informed of the risk they run if they try to escape. I foresee a furore being

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<sup>9</sup> NA CAB 106/733 General Oliver Leese's Operational Correspondence Memo on desertion by Major-General Sir Brian Robertson, Chief Administrative Officer, to Lt. General Sir Oliver Leese, 7 June 1944, and included in a letter sent to The Adjutant-General by General Alexander in June 1944

<sup>10</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Allied Forces, Mediterranean Theatre, Military Headquarters Papers: Discipline, Deserters and Absentees: Comments on Memorandum by the Adjutant General, 27 June 1944

<sup>11</sup> Ibid Letter from Sir Ronald Adam to CAO, 25 February 1944

<sup>12</sup> NA WO 204/6713 Memo from Major-General Penney, Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Division, to HQ VI (US) Corps (British Increment) (2) Absentees and Deserters, Paragraph 10, 2 May 1944

<sup>13</sup> Ibid Paragraph 11, 2 May 1944

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Paragraph 16, 2 May 1944

stirred up both in Parliament and the Press if an escaping prisoner was killed by a mine laid for the purpose of preventing an escape.”<sup>15</sup> Nothing came of Penney’s suggestion.

In the end, three main areas of concern came to dominate the discussion about stronger deterrents in the absence of the death penalty: no general amnesty at the end of the war; forfeiture of demobilization priority; and the despatch of soldiers convicted of desertion to the Far East, all of which were contentious to some extent.

# I

Every soldier seemed to be under the general misapprehension that there would be a general amnesty after the war, despite the fact that there was no amnesty in 1918. Even a Lt. Colonel who acted as President of a General Court Martial in Italy was under the impression that the soldiers who were convicted in his court would be “certain to get a suspended sentence under a general amnesty” when peace came.<sup>16</sup> In April 1944 Adam wrote to Maitland-Wilson that he would put his proposal for a proclamation that no amnesty would be granted to the Army Council and ask them to agree to the publication of a statement that they did not intend to put forward or support any recommendation to the Government for the grant of an amnesty.<sup>17</sup> The Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg, prepared a paper on desertion for Churchill, trying to have the question of a post-war amnesty for deserters dealt with firmly. But in the summer of 1944 he failed to get an amnesty ruled out.<sup>18</sup> Adam, meanwhile, was dealing with the question of the demobilization status of deserters. “Our draft demobilization regulations already state that all periods of service for which the soldier cannot claim pay (i.e. desertion, absence, under

<sup>15</sup> NA WO 204/6713 Letter from the ADJAG, Judge Advocate General’s Branch, 5 May 44

<sup>16</sup> IWM 97/7/1 Brigadier E.A. Arderne, “An Army Life 1918–44”, p.69

<sup>17</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Adam to Maitland-Wilson, 7 April 1944

sentence, release to civil employment, etc) do not count as entitlement towards demobilization priority. The publication of this rule, as soon as it has received approval, should act as a definite deterrent upon the would-be deserter.”<sup>19</sup> But he also attempted to ensure that service prior to desertion would not count towards qualifying service for demobilization. He failed at this, too, at that time. When the plan for the release of serving personnel when the war with Germany was over was first published in October 1944 a special ABCA pamphlet was issued giving full details. The pamphlet suggested that the only penalty suffered by a deserter would be forfeiture of the time spent in a state of desertion, or in prison or detention while serving his sentence. General Alexander wrote: “It would appear that such deduction may only defer the release of these men for a very short time, and it therefore is not a satisfactory deterrent.”<sup>20</sup> He added:

I recommend that the War Office be pressed to take the following action forthwith:-

- To issue a statement that there was no amnesty for military offenders after the last war and that there will be none after this
- To issue orders that all men sentenced to penal servitude or imprisonment for desertion or absence will serve their sentences in full irrespective of the termination of hostilities
- To issue orders that men under suspended sentence will not qualify for release until they have earned remission, which they can only do after posting to a non-European theatre of war.<sup>21</sup>

Churchill finally made a statement in the House of Commons in December 1944, supporting Alexander’s proposals on the amnesty question, and, when the demobilization regulations were published in early 1945 it was made clear that “all previous service counting towards demobilization was disallowed if a man deserted. This meant that when

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<sup>18</sup> Peaty, “The Desertion Crisis in Italy 1944”, pp 76-83

<sup>19</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Adam to Maitland-Wilson, 7 April 1944

<sup>20</sup> NA WO 204 /6714 Discipline, Deserters and Absentees Letter from General Alexander, 30 October 1944

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

his colleagues were demobilized at the end of the war in Europe the deserter would find himself posted to the Far East.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to the despatch of soldiers convicted of desertion to the Far East, Adam's original view was that as soon as the war in Europe was over, there was "everything to be said for sending a large proportion of men convicted of desertion to the Far East." He felt that:

- a. Suspended men already serving with units at the termination of the war with Germany should be sent on early drafts to the Far East
- b. Men serving sentences should be suspended and sent overseas from prisons under the same conditions and in the same proportion as at the moment;
- c. Men who have completed their sentence should be sent on early drafts to the Far East.<sup>23</sup>

Along with compulsory service in the Far East, it was also suggested that men found guilty of desertion should, after a short period in a penal establishment, be posted to special labour units to be employed on portage and similar duties in the forward area. Both these proposals were rejected because:

- administration of units formed completely from men who had failed in the past would be extremely difficult
- the proportion of escapees would be very high and the number of guards required to prevent such escapes would be uneconomical
- It was obvious that Far Eastern theatres would be most reluctant to accept a unit of this type.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part III, p. 365

<sup>23</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Letter from Adam to Maitland-Wilson, 7 April 1944

## II

Reducing the number of deserters also exercised brigade and battalion commanders. In October 1944, for instance, the 167<sup>th</sup> Bde Commander went round his battalions talking to officers, Warrant Officers, Sergeants and L/Sergeants on the subject of absenteeism.<sup>25</sup> On November 27<sup>th</sup> 1944, when the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens (167<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 56<sup>th</sup> Division) was preparing to move to a forward area, all the men had to sign a statement to the effect that if they were absent from that date onwards they realised that they would be charged with desertion.<sup>26</sup> December 1944 seems the first month that any battalion informed its men that they would be declared deserters under the official time limit of 21 days. It is interesting to note, however, that 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon started listing some absentees as "Deserters, Absent Under 21 Days" from the beginning of June 1944, although this was, in all probability, illegal. There is no explanation as to why they did this, but such cases might have been absentee recidivists whom the Army felt deserved a more severe charge than AWOL. Since the threat of being charged with desertion instead of absenteeism under 21 days was not widely broadcast in battalion Orders of the Day as a deterrent and, in summer 1944, no additional manpower requests could be made to replace battalion deserters, there seems to have been no constructive reason to have started listing deserters in such a manner.

A different tack in its drive against absenteeism was taken by the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders. Their CO tried to dissuade would-be deserters by pointing out the financial penalties accruing:

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<sup>24</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945 Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 6

<sup>25</sup> NA WO 170/1436 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Scottish War Diary for October 1944

<sup>26</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for November 1944

It is felt that men do not realise the full significance of punishments for absence and desertion and the following points should be brought to notice of all ranks: In the case of absence where Field Punishment is awarded pay is forfeited from the day of commencement of absence, throughout the period of absence and while in custody awaiting trial and for the full period of Field Punishment awarded.

In the case of desertion the above forfeitures apply and that pay is forfeited for the full period of detention served.

All Voluntary allotments cease after 28 days in Detention.

In addition men convicted of a charge of absence, the Pay Anniversary date is brought forward by the number of days absent, which means that when a man becomes eligible for upgrading to a higher class of pay the day which it reckons is the Pay anniversary date plus the number of days absent.<sup>27</sup>

The 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens made a point in its Battalion Orders Part 1 of January 18<sup>th</sup> 1945 of re-printing the Prime Minister's answer to a question in the House regarding the general remission of sentences after the war. "There is no reason why the men concerned should not complete their sentences irrespective of the end of the war with Germany or the end of the war with Japan." The CO pointed out that "since the Bn left Monte Cassino to the present day, it has had a very small percentage of deserters. This is one of the reasons why the Bn has a very good name in the Bde." To ensure that this state of affairs continued, the CO decided that, "commencing tomorrow, in ever issue of Bn Orders Part I, the names of those ORs who decide to desert will be published."<sup>28</sup> On January 19<sup>th</sup> 16 deserters were named. Ten of the men, who had deserted between November 29<sup>th</sup> and January 10<sup>th</sup>, had not been apprehended. Of the other six, four had been returned to the battalion within two days, and the other two in nine days, so they were really guilty of being AWOL rather than of desertion.<sup>29</sup> By February 17<sup>th</sup> four more names had been added to the list, all of whom

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<sup>27</sup> NA WO 170/4988 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders War Diary for March 1945 Battalion Orders 8 March

<sup>28</sup> NA WO 170/5060 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for January 1945

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

went AWOL on January 27<sup>th</sup> and who were returned to the battalion by January 31<sup>st</sup>.<sup>30</sup> By the end of February almost all of the named “deserters” had been apprehended.

### III

It was normal practice to promulgate verdicts and sentences, after confirmation, in the orders of all the formation in which the convening of the court had appeared, and in every case in the orders of the unit concerned. “Such actions can be used to support the argument that courts martial were used as warnings to others,” state Mark Connelly and Walter Miller, in an article in *20<sup>th</sup> Century British History*.<sup>31</sup> They drew a clear line between the preoccupations of the High Command – particularly, Auchinleck, Montgomery and Alexander – over what they perceived to be a major desertion problem, and the exemplary aspects of courts martial sentencing in North Africa and Italy between 1940-1943. They believed that the army commanders often overstated the scale of the “supposed” desertion problem and that their fears “created an atmosphere in which the details of individual cases were often overridden in the name of discipline and military efficiency. Paradoxically, such an attitude only added to the High Command’s concerns, for by ensuring a high level of convictions, the outcomes of courts martial appeared to confirm the validity of its views.”<sup>32</sup> Connelly and Miller maintained that the obsession with lax discipline as the explanation for poor morale and poor behaviour reached two peaks, first in North Africa in 1942-3, and then in Italy from late 1943, but that morale was never as poor as senior officers feared, and that the ‘stick’ method of punishment was often placed higher than the ‘carrot’ method of encouragement and understanding.<sup>33</sup> Brigadier G.W.B. James, the Middle East Command psychiatrist, stated that: “Soldiers’ morale, in North Africa, was like

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid War Diary for February 1945

<sup>31</sup> Connelly & Miller, “British Courts Martial in North Africa”, pp. 217-242

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

an india rubber ball, quick to recover and never down for long.”<sup>34</sup> Auchinleck and others disregarded the fluctuations and assumed a continually depressed state of morale and discipline that could be solved only by vigorous enforcement of military law.<sup>35</sup>

Certainly, in Italy, higher sentences for desertion were deliberately awarded on the Anzio beachhead, with the imposition of sentences of five years’ penal servitude for desertion, in place of the normal standard of three years.<sup>36</sup> But even in November 1944, when desertion was peaking, the ADJAG 8<sup>th</sup> Army noted that a deserter, who had a clean conduct sheet, received a sentence of three years’ penal servitude.<sup>37</sup> Other offences incurred heavier sentences, particularly cowardice. One soldier remembers that on the night of November 11<sup>th</sup> 1944:

It was raining heavily and we were lined up waiting to attack. All hell was let loose. The platoon officer moved forward, always at the front, pistol in his hand. The order was ‘On your feet and move’. It was scary. It always was. At the start line H... was not 20 or 30 yards away. He was the next man to me. I had got to be his corporal. As I got up I saw he didn’t. It was my job to keep my section going forward. I ordered him but he was lay on his back looking up. His eyes were glazed. He was glued to the ground. He was in shock. I gave him just three seconds. I had to move. He had frozen completely. That was the last time I saw H.... A few weeks later there was a one liner on battalion part II orders. It simply stated “Private H... was found guilty of cowardice in the face of the enemy. He was sentenced to 10 years in a military prison.”<sup>38</sup>

There are no records of FGCsM for desertion in Italy available at the National Archives.

The limited number of files there for the relevant period deal principally with cowardice

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Connelly & Miller, “British Courts Martial”, p. 237

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 10

<sup>37</sup> NA WO 71/926 Note from the JAG Branch, 10 November 1944, with regard to the mitigating circumstances in the case of a man accused of cowardice and sentenced to five years’ penal servitude, “who does not appear to have been away from duty for as long a period as many a deserter.”



and mutiny.<sup>39</sup> In general, the sentence for cowardice was five years, in some cases remitted by one or two years.<sup>40</sup> A lesser sentence, three years penal servitude, varied to one year's hard labour, was awarded in the case of a man charged with cowardice in that, when holding a defensive position in the line, he had retired to the Rear HQ, but who had subsequently taken part in five or six night patrols.<sup>41</sup> Other men charged with cowardice were sentenced to two-three years' penal servitude.<sup>42</sup> In one case a man who had gone AWOL seven times between 1940 and 1943, when he was dealt with at battalion level with a forfeiture of pay, and had two other charges on his record, one for being improperly dressed, and the other for allowing himself to be in a verminous state, was sentenced to six years' penal servitude.<sup>43</sup> Sentences for mutiny varied from death by being shot, commuted to seven years' penal servitude; penal servitude for life, mitigated to five years penal servitude; and five to 10 years' penal servitude.<sup>44</sup>

In the 1943-45 campaign, a Sergeant-Major recalled that whenever his battalion went out of the line to rest, "there was a building reserved in the back area ...which was a courts martial building. If the desertion was proved, they got three years."<sup>45</sup> One battalion, the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens (167<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 56<sup>th</sup> Division) maintained a general record of all absentees from August to December 1944. There were 153 absentees who were responsible for 196 individual acts of absence without leave – 34 of the men were serial absentees. The

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<sup>38</sup> Mills, *One for Grandad!*, p. 24

<sup>39</sup> The records looked at were NA WO 71/833-956, not all of which were for the Italian Campaign

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 71/834; WO 71/835; WO 71/840; WO 71/842; WO 71/843; WO 71/856; WO 71/858; WO 71/868; WO 71/869; WO 71/870; WO 71/873; WO 71/885; WO 71/905; WO 71/926; WO 71/936; WO 71/933;

<sup>41</sup> NA WO 71/853

<sup>42</sup> NA WO 71/842; WO 71/843; WO 71/866; WO 71/867; WO 71/872; WO 71/932; WO 71/935;

<sup>43</sup> NA WO 71/850

<sup>44</sup> NA WO 71/849; NA WO 71/878 and NA WO 71/879

<sup>45</sup> IWM Sound Archives 10421 L. Thornton, Reel 21

majority of the 153 absentees were away from the battalion for a day or so, five at the most - before they surrendered to the Military Police. Of the 52 absentees recorded for October, 23 men were tried by Field General Court Martial between October 22<sup>nd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. Sentences varied from 56 days' detention (six men); 90 days' detention (two men); six months' detention (three men); and 2 years' hard labour (12 men).<sup>46</sup> Few other battalion war diaries contain a full complement of Orders of the Day, so it is difficult to make a definitive statement, but from the existing evidence it would seem that sentences awarded by FGCM at the end of 1944 seem to have hovered around the two-to-three-year mark, rather than the five year sentences of Anzio. In 56<sup>th</sup> Division, for instance, of 14 men sentenced by FGCM on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, one was sentenced to three years; five for two years; two for 18 months; four for one year; one for nine months and one for 28 days detention.<sup>47</sup> In 4<sup>th</sup> Division, three promulgations in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The King's Regiment Battalion Orders indicated that three years penal servitude was awarded for desertion in November.<sup>48</sup> Even in 78<sup>th</sup> Division, which suffered the highest rate of desertion of all the divisions, the length of sentence for desertion seems to have hovered around two-three years.<sup>49</sup> Only in two cases were longer sentences, six years, recorded in the cases of men found guilty of both Desertion and Disobeying a Lawful Command.<sup>50</sup>

It would appear, therefore, from the limited evidence available, that exemplary sentences were not the norm in Italy, except in exceptional circumstances such as Anzio, or in answer

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<sup>46</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944

<sup>47</sup> NA WO 170/1466 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944

<sup>48</sup> NA WO 170/1418 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The King's Regiment War Diary for November 1944 Battalion Orders, 23 November

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 170/1446 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment War Diary for October 1944 Daily Orders, 21 October

<sup>50</sup> NA WO 170/1422 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment War Diaries for November and December 1944 Routine Orders, 25 November, 16 December and 30 December

to multiple charges. This had a historical precedent. Echoing, to some extent, what infantrymen were to feel in Italy in 1943-45, the mail censor in the 1918 Italian campaign wrote about "a feeling of personal victimization, which, coupled with a sense of revolt against uncongenial surroundings, gives rise to continuous and increasing discontent and weariness".<sup>51</sup> This led, according to Gerald Oram, to the development of an "increasingly lenient approach to discipline within which capital convictions were avoided."<sup>52</sup>

#### IV

When a man was charged with an offence the first officer to look at his case was generally his company commander, who would deal with the matter if he was satisfied that the offence was one he was competent and authorized to try. Otherwise the case went before the commanding officer. The commanding officer could not try officers or Warrant Officers, but in the case of ordinary soldiers he could award a sentence of detention of up to 28 days; a fine, for drunkenness only, up to a maximum of £2; pay deductions; confinement to barracks for a maximum of 14 days; extra guard and piquet duties; and admonition. If the soldier was on active service the commanding officer could award field punishment of up to 28 days and forfeiture of pay for the number of days the field punishment was carried out.<sup>53</sup> If the case was sent to court, the soldier would be tried by a Field General Court Martial at a Courts Martial and Holding Centre. The number of deserters at large in Italy resulted in considerable administrative difficulties in bringing cases to trial as speedily as possible. Deserters tended to make their way south, as far away from the front as possible. When they were arrested it was generally impossible to bring them to trial on documentary evidence since the evidence that would prove that they had

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Oram, "Pious Perjury: Discipline and Morale in the British Force in Italy 1917-1918", p. 430

<sup>52</sup> Oram, "Pious Perjury", pp. 412-130

<sup>53</sup> McPherson, *Discipline*, p. 25

deserted to avoid active operations was only available in their units, which were more often than not engaged in active operations. It was therefore impossible to bring deserters to trial until their unit had been withdrawn from operations for a period of rest.<sup>54</sup>

In North Africa deserters had been held in Reinforcement Training Depots until arrangements could be made to return them to the forward area for trial. This had proved highly unsatisfactory for several reasons. Escapes were frequent as the only accommodation available was wire cages, and guards selected from reinforcements awaiting postings had no interest in stopping any determined attempt to escape. But far worse was the effect on the morale of reinforcements when such large numbers of deserters were present in the same depot. It was equally impossible for units in the line to accommodate and guard large numbers of soldiers awaiting promulgation or disposal to penal establishments after trial. The difficulty of holding and trying deserters was solved by the establishment of Courts Martial and Holding Centres. The first of these units was formed by Eighth Army in the Western Desert and then two more were formed in Italy. Two or more permanent Courts Martial sat at these centres. The President of each Permanent Court was a member of the Pool of Permanent Presidents, and the members were officers detailed by forward units for a week or fortnight at a time.

Permanent Presidents were found to be desirable for three reasons. Firstly, in Italy the supply of experienced field officers who had some knowledge of military law and who could thus be relied upon to conduct a Court Martial diminished rapidly, especially in fighting formations. Secondly, where large numbers of cases had to be dealt with a great

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<sup>54</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May

deal of time was saved by their employment and, thirdly, greater uniformity in sentencing was secured.<sup>55</sup> Some commanders in the field obviously disagreed with the latter point:

Presidents of F.G.Cs.M. especially permanent ones from Court Martial Centres have not convicted a man of desertion unless it can be proved that he personally was given a direct order to proceed up the line or else to do a definite job. In order to secure a conviction it has not been sufficient to prove that the Bn was in the line in contact with the enemy at a time when the man deserted.... As regards the awarding of sentences there appears to be no consistency at all. In one case 2 men had gone absent together, one man being awarded 5 years Penal Servitude, the other deprived of 42 days pay.<sup>56</sup>

As the distance between the location in Italy where the deserters were arrested and the forward Court Martial and Holding Centres became longer, the problem of moving the men became more acute. Owing to the unsuitable nature of the rolling stock, the long period occupied by a train journey and the frequent halts, parties despatched by train, even with 100% escort, showed a very high percentage of escapes. There were cases of as many as 50% of soldiers awaiting trial escaping during the course of a single train journey. Further, long delays resulted from the lack of suitable escorts: it was acknowledged that, for reasons of morale, reinforcements proceeding to the line should not act as escorts to deserters. The problem was solved by a new unit, known as a 'Court Martial Escort Unit', which was formed in January 1945. The unit was equipped with nine, 3-ton lorries fitted with special wire cages, each holding 16 soldiers in custody. The unit contained sufficient guard and administrative personnel to establish a staging post between Rome and the forward area, since the distance was too great to enable the trip to be made in one day.<sup>57</sup>

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1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 3

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>56</sup> NA WO 170/1411 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Diary for April 1944

<sup>57</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, pp. 4-5

By February 1944 the lack of space in military prisons forced the authorities to make greater provisions. It was decided to increase the capacity of No. 56 Military Prison and Detention Barracks from 300 to 600 and locate it in Brindisi; to increase No. 55 Military Prison and Detention Barracks from 130 to 400 capacity and locate it at Lecce; and to move No. 3 Field Punishment Camp from Sicily to Lucerna and change it to both a Field Punishment Camp and Detention Barracks for 200 men. Furthermore, a new Military Prison for 400 would be sited at Portici, with Nos. 25 & 26 Field Punishment Camps and Detention Barracks to house 200 each.<sup>58</sup> This action was taken following reports that the situation in Italy with regard to the disposal of soldiers awaiting trial by Court Martial, and the provision of penal establishments, was totally inadequate.<sup>59</sup> At that time, February 1944, there were over 500 cases awaiting trial; No. 1 Court Martial and Holding Centre was overtaxed and additional holding accommodation had to be provided. In addition, No. 25 Field Punishment Centre was full to capacity and an overflow of soldiers under sentence (SUS) were temporarily accommodated in a Prisoner of War Camp.

## V

The question of how to deal with those sentenced to long periods of detention or imprisonment was difficult. They constituted a waste of manpower, and required a number of officers and men to look after them. In 1942 the Director of Military Training took over the training policy in detention barracks and as a result “the soldier spent all his time in hard training and came out fit to take his place in battle”.<sup>60</sup>

Soldiers serving longer sentences were incarcerated in Canadian and British prisons that had been opened in Italy. They operated on the fundamental detention barracks premise that conditions should be sufficiently unpleasant to

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<sup>58</sup> NA WO 170/1 G1 (Br) AFHQ Jan-March 1944 Appendix ‘A’ to DAG’s Fortnightly Conference Minutes (No. 4) held at AFHQ on Tuesday, 22 February 1944

<sup>59</sup> NA WO 204/6712 Memo from AFHQ Adv. Adm. Ech, CMF, to AFHQ G-1 (Br), 7 February 1944

<sup>60</sup> LHCMA Adam Papers 3/13 Chapter V – Morale and Discipline

deter soldiers from casually choosing to endure them. The camp's War Diary remarks that : 'of necessity initiation must be tough, or the whole camp would fail in its purpose, that of instilling a sense of discipline in soldiers who 'fall out of line'. It is hard to describe it – the soldier under sentence in not touched in any way, but he is kept so busy doing things, and being constantly shouted out by four or five sergeants, that he doesn't know whether he is coming or going, and soon he doesn't care. All movements in camp were at the double. There was a daily half-hour talking period and a one-hour Sunday reading period when prisoners would read mail and write one letter. They might also at this time eat one issue chocolate bar. While conditions were undoubtedly tough, it must be kept in mind that prisoners were not being shot at by Germans.<sup>61</sup>

The last point was not lost on a deserter from Alex Bowlby's unit when he was warned that he would get three years in prison. "And I'll be 'ere when you're pushing up daisies," he replied.<sup>62</sup>

Field Punishment Camps were not pleasant places, and discipline was reportedly even stricter there than in the detention barracks. "Very few soldiers have ... suffered the severity, humiliation and degradation of field punishment pack drill ... it was the ultimate for line dodgers. The object was to break you first and then make you. After your treatment there, you would obey any orders given to you or else. And so it was."<sup>63</sup> The prisoners' hair "was completely sheared to the bone. One theory about this is when you are all hairless it takes some identity away from you all. You lose some of your individuality and personality and you become institutionalised."<sup>64</sup> The majority of each day was spent in close order drill.

The staff were master drill sergeants, and they worked in relays about every hour, in order to keep us incessantly pounding the square. It was heartbreaking endless monotony, which was only relieved by the change of voices in the words of command. We were drilled at 100mph with a turn every 10 to 15 paces continuously, ceaselessly and with no respite. The worst was to come in

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<sup>61</sup> Copp & McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, pp. 65-66

<sup>62</sup> Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 108

<sup>63</sup> Mills, *One for Grandad!*, p. 7

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9

the afternoons. That was pack drill. This was truly a test of strength and endurance. It started by counter marching and a torrent of screams, orders, threats and abuse poured out as we staggered and lurched round in a large circle at a fast doubling pace ... You were weighed down with your pack and equipment ... the open cuts into the flesh from the equipment straps would not be felt at that stage.<sup>65</sup>

This routine was carried out seven days a week. The prisoners were allowed to speak for only 30 minutes a day, there was no reading of any description, and no mail was ever received.<sup>66</sup> Even so, some men were more than happy to sit the war out in prison. One deserter recalled:

In the glasshouse we got three meals a day, a roof over our heads and safety. Up the line we slept in slits open to the pouring rain which fell most of the time in sunny Italy. Food didn't always get to the forward positions so we often went hungry and then, on top of everything else, there was the danger. Time in the nick was hard, but I had had a hard life in civvy street, so whatever the screws could fling at me was water off a duck's back. Some of the men doing time were well off in the moosh. They had got themselves some right khushti numbers; in the cookhouse as orderlies, in the Sergeant's Mess as waiters – a couple were said to have been bumboys to the screws. What did such nick wallahs want with remission of sentence? This was offered to those who had deserted from front-line units, in order to get them back up the line. After about six weeks the prisoner would be interviewed and told his case was under revision. On a second interview he would be offered remission of sentence if he returned to a front-line unit. At the end of the war in Europe this sort of offer was made in most nicks, in the UK and overseas, to bring the drafts for Burma up to strength. The attitude of most of the blokes doing time was that if we would not fight Jerry in Europe we were certainly not going to fight in a jungle against the Japs.<sup>67</sup>

## VI

One of McCreery's suggestions in February 1944 had been that sentences should be carried out in full. The object of suspension of sentence was twofold. Firstly it enabled the commander to effect a saving of manpower, by returning to duty those soldiers who, after serving part of their sentences, were considered fit to return to their commands, in order to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid p. 13

<sup>66</sup> Ibid p. 11



show by their conduct that they intended to make good. Secondly, it gave the soldier a chance to rehabilitate himself.<sup>68</sup> All sentences awarded by courts-martial and which were in execution were subject to periodical review by a superior military authority. The first review was carried out 42 days after committal and subsequent reviews took place at intervals not exceeding six months. Suspension of sentence meant that, although a soldier had been tried by court-martial, found guilty and sentenced, the part of the sentence which he had not yet served was held in abeyance for the time being, and the man was returned to his unit for normal duty. Sentences under suspension were also reviewed at intervals not exceeding three months, and the result of such reviews was mainly determined by the conduct of the man himself while under suspended sentence. If he had been of good behaviour for a reasonable period, the suspended sentence might be remitted.

Faced with crippling manpower shortages, commanders in Italy generally practised a system of suspended sentences, in the belief that many men had broken under strain and only wanted a change to redeem themselves. "Eighth Army are not suspending all cases automatically after any specified period, but are suspending fairly freely. The figures suggest that four out of five men whose sentences are suspended made good, at least for a time."<sup>69</sup> Between January and May 1944 only one in 100 suspended sentences were put into execution.<sup>70</sup> Some men benefited from this policy. A twice-wounded soldier who had deserted at the start of the Sicilian campaign surrendered after the campaign and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. He wrote to his platoon commander a few weeks

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<sup>67</sup> Lucas, *The British Soldier*, p. 27

<sup>68</sup> McPherson, *Discipline*, p. 34

<sup>69</sup> NA WO 204/6713 Memo on Suspended Sentences, AAG(PS) to DAG, 1 May 1944

<sup>70</sup> NA CAB102/224 "The British Soldier in Italy", p. 40

after his trial, saying that he hoped to have his sentence suspended so that he could rejoin the battalion.<sup>71</sup>

Not everyone, however, agreed with this policy. The author of a report for the Morale Committee on the mood of British troops, like McCreery, personally believed that suspended sentences were a short-sighted reinforcement policy, which demonstrated that a severe sentence of punishment meant little and clearly illustrated that no grave consequence followed the deserter's method of escaping battle.<sup>72</sup> A would-be offender realized that, in most cases, a long sentence would probably be suspended and the balance remitted after a portion had been served. Thus the actual length of sentences had small significance or terror for the determined or hardened criminal. It also produced the converse effect: Presidents of courts-martial, who wished to award a severe and exemplary punishment, often awarded an excessively harsh sentence in the belief that this would in all probability be suspended and substantially remitted.<sup>73</sup> A point in case was a General Court Martial at which 14 NCOs and men were charged with mutiny. The President of the Court recalled:

The accused were defended by two very good advocates, but they were found guilty of mutiny and inciting to mutiny, and of that there was not the least doubt. The court consisted of two full Staff Colonels. The other two Lt.Colonels and I came from the battle area. We voted for the death sentence, but the two Staff Colonels refused to join and we had to be satisfied with a long prison sentences.

When we voted for the death sentence we knew, of course, that they would never be shot. We simply wished to show that we considered death to be a fitting punishment for the crime and that we would be satisfied if it were carried out.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> IWM 84/2/1 D.J. Fenner, p. 7

<sup>72</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, 1943 December- 1945 March  
Subject: Morale – British Troops, 25 February, 1944, p. 3

<sup>73</sup> McPherson, *Discipline*, p. 54

<sup>74</sup> IWM 97/7/1 E.A. Arderne, p. 69

The policy adopted in relation to suspension of sentence gave rise to some differences of opinion between the field formations and AFHQ. Battalion commanders were almost unanimous in saying sentences were being suspended too early, and criticised particularly the frequent suspensions of sentences of soldiers sent to the Middle East after only six months of their sentence had been served. They argued that conditions in prisons were infinitely better than those in the line and that the return of men who had been guilty of desertion for a comparatively short period in a "comfortable" prison encouraged others to desert and had an adverse effect on morale. There is no doubt that in many cases men under suspended sentence repeated their offences, taking with them other men from the unit who had not previously offended.<sup>75</sup> The policy could also cause resentment. One soldier, who had endured 101 days in a Field Punishment Camp, and had learned that a former comrade had been sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, was astonished to meet the man two years later, walking down a main street in Alexandria, Egypt.

I could hardly believe my eyes. He was as free as a bird. He told me an unbelievable story. After three months he was released and taken out of the infantry and was put in the Royal Corps of Signals. He was sent to the Middle East where there was no fighting. He also got an increase in pay. It was the biggest con I have ever been knowingly subject to. I was cheated because it exposed a deliberate policy of high command to sentence a man to 10 years for cowardice then release him after 3 months and give him a base job with higher pay a 1000 miles away from the front line. If these facts were known at the time by the infantry in the trenches I am sure there would have been a mutiny.<sup>76</sup>

## .VII

The field officers' concerns were addressed by concentrating on a more careful selection of soldiers under sentence for suspension and on their rehabilitation by a special course prior

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<sup>75</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Party V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 11

<sup>76</sup> Mills, *One for Grandad!* p. 46

to their return to the line.<sup>77</sup> In August 1944, it was decided to establish a 'Rehabilitation Centre' to which men who were considered potentially redeemable as soldiers could be transferred from military prisons. This 'Rehabilitation Centre', which was intended as a development of the Field Punishment Camp system, was opened in December 1944 and was known as No. 34 Special Training Barracks, CMF, with room for 300 men. Only category "A" soldiers under sentence were accepted in this unit. Suitable premises were found in a modern Italian barracks near Rome with adequate training grounds adjacent. Its purpose was to train as 'fighting soldiers' men under sentence and to act as a transition from a Military Prison to a line unit, and it appears that the intention was that some of these men might be given a chance to 'redeem themselves' following their previous desertion, in front-line action. The Special Training Barracks, therefore, concentrated on military training and strict discipline.<sup>78</sup> The normal period spent at the Barracks was three months, and during this time there was a progressive increase in the 'amenities' of the barrack room, the amount of trust and relative liberty of movement, which a man enjoyed. During his progress through the three months the soldier was trained for battle up to and including platoon training and particular emphasis was laid on physical training. At the same time throughout the course the commandant and his company officers made a special study of the man, aimed at helping him to rehabilitate himself and ensuring that he had the intention and the ability to make good as a soldier in the line. By the end of August 1945, only five of the 416 soldiers whose sentences were suspended had been recommitted to serve the remainder of their sentence.<sup>79</sup> The Rehabilitation Centre did nothing to lower the number

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<sup>77</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 6

<sup>78</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 132

<sup>79</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 5, The Problem of Desertion, p. 7

of deserters, of course. It only attempted to return as many deserters as possible to the line. Given that it only became fully operational at the beginning of 1945, there was not sufficient time before the end of the war to indicate whether it would have been more successful at lowering the numbers of men re-offending than under the system of suspended sentences practised earlier in the campaign.

## VIII

One psychiatrist examined six inmates of the Special Training Barracks in January 1945. He believed that four of them, who had been sick men when they deserted, and should have been sent back as sick prior to reaching the stage of desertion, would benefit from their stay at the Special Training Barracks and should be returned to duty; one man, a regular soldier, should be returned to prison to complete his sentence; and the sixth man he regarded as willing and determined to fight, but about whose ability to stand up to action he was uncertain. “In summary, the great majority of men suitable for 34 Special Training Barracks are those who would never have deserted had their superior officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, not failed to observe that they were very sick men at the end of their tether.”<sup>80</sup> This last point was well-established at the time. The Oliver Committee, set up by the Government in 1943 to investigate and report on all aspects of the treatment of men under sentence in Naval and Military Prisons and Detention Barracks in the United Kingdom, had emphasised the importance of good welfare work in the units from which the men had come, as the principal means of saving offenders from getting into the trouble which had led to their detention. They considered that if the “admirable” Notes for Offices issued by the Adjutant-General under the title *The Soldiers’ Welfare* were fully carried into effect, particularly by Company and Platoon Officers, perhaps as many as 50%

of those soldiers who were under sentence would never have had to be committed to detention.<sup>81</sup> Attempts had been made to address this concern in Italy in 1944:

Renewed emphasis was placed on the duties of the platoon commander; he should receive and settle in all newcomers and should watch his men carefully for signs of strain so that cases could be taken in time.<sup>82</sup>

But nothing seemed to work in the winter of 1944/45. The threat of longer sentences was counter-productive; suspended sentences worked for some men who were keen to get back to their own units, but made no impact on determined deserters.

Crimes such as desertion and self-inflicted wounds were often difficult to deal with, especially when one knew that the accused simply wanted a court martial. He would receive a stiff sentence and spend the rest of the war with good food and in safety. Some Commanding Officers simply dealt with desertion by sending the men straight back to duty. This often did not pay and might lead to legal trouble.<sup>83</sup>

## IX

Were any of the measures considered by the Army Council in spring and summer 1944 regarding no general amnesty and the forfeiture of demobilization priority, effective? The announcements, in December 1944, that, as far as the existing government was concerned, there would be no amnesty for deserters after the war, and then, in January 1945, that a man convicted of desertion after February 1<sup>st</sup> 1945 would forfeit all previous service for the purpose of the demobilisation scheme, came too late to influence the flood of deserters in the winter of 1944/45.<sup>84</sup> The Morale Committee reported in February 1945 that many soldiers believed that a change of government at the end of hostilities might lead to a change of policy regarding a general amnesty, although the amendment to the release

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<sup>80</sup> CMAC GC/192/18 Memo on 34 Special Training Barracks by Lt. Col. J.D.W. Pearce, Adviser in Psychiatry, AFHQ, 13 January 1945

<sup>81</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 131

<sup>82</sup> NA CAB 101/224 "The British Soldier in Italy", pp. 40-41

<sup>83</sup> IWM 97/7/1 E.A. Arderne, p. 69

regulations had undoubtedly made a great impression. The Committee could not say how far the reduced AWOL figures for February could be attributed to the December and January announcements. The fact that active operations during February were on a small scale and that weather conditions had improved were also contributory factors.<sup>85</sup>

The incidence of desertion not only took men away from the front line, but tied down a large number of men in the Court Martial and Holding Centre, the Field Punishment Camps and other penal establishments who might have been used more directly in the war effort. Adam believed that only five per cent of deserters were criminals who had no interest in or intention of fighting, and that the majority were men who broke down because they had been in the line too long, or had been posted to unfamiliar battalions.<sup>86</sup> The same argument he applied against the re-introduction of the death penalty – that desertion was not due to fear – would therefore apply to all other forms of deterrent suggested during 1944. Adam had written to Alexander that he hoped the proposals put forward in April 1944 “will go some way towards solving this serious problem,” but added: “but even these punishments will not have a great effect. I am told by officers returning that it is cold, wet and absence of relief, much more than danger, that is producing the deserter.”<sup>87</sup>

The various legal approaches considered by the Army seem to have had very little effect on the majority of deserters. And in the view of many, not only the Adjutant-General, neither would the re-introduction of the death penalty:

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<sup>84</sup> NA CAB 106/441 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943-2 May 1945, Part IV, The Campaign in Lombardy, 1 April to 2 May 1945, p. 2

<sup>85</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945 Desertion and Absence, p. 2

<sup>86</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Adam to CAO, 25 February 1944

It is important here to mention that the futility of the death penalty for desertion in war-time – a punishment so frequently and irresponsibly advocated as an alleged deterrent – has been demonstrated beyond doubt by a comparison of the incident of desertion in the British Army in the two World Wars. Discipline is an integral part of morale, and in the absence of the latter will most certainly break down. Indeed, from the abundant evidence available, it should be clear and indisputable that morale depends not on threats, nor on driving, but on leading men.<sup>88</sup>

The greatest influence on morale, therefore, was not the threat of formal discipline, but rather the ability of officers to persuade their men to stay in the line and fight.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid Adam to Maitland-Wilson 7 April 1944

<sup>88</sup> MacNalty & Mellor, *Medical Services in War*, p. 193



## CHAPTER VI

### INFORMAL DISCIPLINE: OFFICERS, OTHER RANKS, SELF-HELP AND MORALE

The Southborough Committee emphasized the corporate impact of morale rather than the individual. Morale, it stated, “is collective confidence, the spirit of a good team at football.”<sup>1</sup> To continue the analogy, ORs were the footballers who went out on to the pitch to represent their team, but it was the job of the club directors, manager and trainers – the executive officers at all levels – to ensure that the team was physically and mentally prepared for the challenge they faced. The importance of officers, and their influence on the morale of the men under them, both positive and negative, cannot be understated. As *The Soldier's Welfare* indicated, it was the officers who had the responsibility of inspiring the men under his command with a belief in the cause for which they were fighting, and a readiness to fight to the last.<sup>2</sup> If we go back to Lt.-Col. Wigram's belief that out of every platoon of 22 men, there were six gutsy men, twelve ‘sheep’ and four to six ineffective men, and then consider the fact that, apart from a hard core of determined deserters, many of whom were criminals, the majority of deserters were ‘involuntary’ absentees, it is evident that maintaining the discipline and morale of the twelve ‘sheep’ in each platoon was of paramount importance to the ability of the army to prosecute the war.<sup>3</sup> Wigram's assessment was echoed by Lt. Tiffin, a platoon commander in the 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry, who said about the men under his command:

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<sup>1</sup> The Southborough Committee, *Creation of Morale*, p. 208

<sup>2</sup> *A Soldier's Welfare*, Foreword, p. 5

<sup>3</sup> NA WO 231/14 Operations in Sicily, 9 December 1943

There would be 30 odd. As I got to know them better there would be 10, 11, 12 people you could rely on in practically any circumstances. There would be another 10, 11 or 12 who, if everybody else was doing their duty, could be relied upon to follow suit. Then there were 5 or 6 who were not particularly reliable.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter is concerned with two aspects of corporate morale. Firstly, by examining the role of officers and NCOs in sustaining bellicosity, and secondly, by exploring the ways in which units, and individuals, employed self-help to sustain corporate spirit.

## I

The importance of leadership in terms of morale was re-iterated over and over again by the War Office. *The Soldier's Welfare*, for instance, was joined by a pamphlet entitled *Suppose You Were A Nazi Agent*. This proposed a situation in which an enemy agent was commissioned as a British officer in a British unit, but was forbidden to employ actual sabotage and was told to keep within King's Regulations. The pamphlet listed all the actions the enemy agent might take in these circumstances to damage morale. They are worth listing in full as they detailed what actions the War Office regarded as characteristic of a bad officer. "Most of these actions are damaging to the convictions of competence, power and worth, and in their avoidance lies the key to good man-management," concluded the summation.<sup>5</sup>

### A: Damaging Trust in Leaders:

- (1) By display or abuse of officer privilege at a time when conditions for the men are bad
- (2) By failure to explain the significance of orders, so that they appear inhuman or arbitrary
- (3) By failure to explain sudden interference with leave or other privileges
- (4) By failure to take adequate disciplinary action when necessary

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<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Douglas Tiffin, 'D' Coy 16<sup>th</sup> DLI, quoted in Hart, *Heat of Battle*, p. 163

<sup>5</sup> M. Lewis, "The Promotion and Maintenance of Mental Health in the Military Community" *RAMC Journal*, Vol. 96-97, 1951, Vol. XCVI, February 1951, No. 2. Part II, Section VI, The Role of Medical Officers, Administrators, Commanders and Leaders with Regard to the Promotion and Maintenance of Mental Health, pp. 102-114

- (5) By taking severe disciplinary action without investigating the cause of the delinquency or the defect of morale which lay behind it.
- (6) By sarcastic comment and criticism
- (7) By failure to give praise where it is due
- (8) By building up a façade of discipline without a basis in morale
- (9) By being too close on the heels of the Non-commissioned officers in their work
- (10) By ignoring Non-Commissioned officers in their work
- (11) By over-estimation of the enemy, or by inaccurate estimation of our own value
- (12) By displaying ignorance of our aims, and a lack of interest in the Army and its history
- (13) By display of social or political bias, disguised, if possible, under a different label
- (14) By dodging questions and discussion
- (15) By making it clear in behaviour, rather than speech, that Service is an unwelcome interruption in life

**B: Damaging Group Morale:**

- (1) By breaking up groups of friends in platoons and barrack-rooms
- (2) By changing men over so that they never get time to settle in one job
- (3) By keeping an intelligent man in a boring job, or by putting an unintelligent or unsuitable man in a position of authority
- (4) By boring men with parts of training they already know well
- (5) By being bored with training instructions yourself
- (6) By instructing men more frequently and more intensely in the maintenance, rather than the use, of weapons

**C: Damaging Individual Morale:**

- (1) By failure to show interest or to encourage a man regularly
- (2) By ignoring minor requests in relation to leave
- (3) By refusing to listen to men's grievances or, better still, by paying little attention when they do come to them
- (4) By making men be excessively fussy about relatively unimportant affairs
- (5) By writing to men's families in an inaccurate or offhand way, or by not writing at all

There is no record of whether this War Office pamphlet reached Italy, and was seen by any of the officers serving there, but in Italy the importance of leadership was taken just as seriously. HQ, Allied Armies in Italy, produced their own semi-official pamphlet, partly authored by Eric Linklater, entitled *Morale and the Officer*. It was intended as an element of officer training and its concerns reflected those in *Suppose You Were A Nazi Agent*. According to the pamphlet: "An officer has no duty more important than of sustaining and

raising the morale of his men.”<sup>6</sup> A good officer, the pamphlet stated, was one who should have the respect, and the liking of his men. Respect was more important than liking and could only be obtained by the example an officer set, by his own competence and by his fairness. If the officer was respected, liking would follow. The officer’s “performance in the line, from showing guts to shaving, will be watched and reflected in his command. His good example can pull up a poor command, but a bad example can wreck a good command, and can wreck it in a very short time.”<sup>7</sup> A good officer was an officer who led by example:

Officers could not afford to show their feelings as openly as the men; they had more need to dissemble. In a big battle a subaltern had little or no influence over the fate of his platoon – it was the plaything of the gods. His role was essentially histrionic. He had to feign a casual and cheerful optimism to create an illusion of normality and make it seem as if there was nothing in the least strange about the outrageous things one was asked to do. Only in this way could he ease the tension, quell any panic and convince his men that everything would come out right in the end.<sup>8</sup>

Fred Majdalany remembered a Regular Army artillery major, who had risen through the ranks and who definitely set a good example when he was with the Lancashire Fusiliers in the mountains around Cassino, overlooked on all sides by the enemy:

He had the old soldier’s knack of making himself comfortable anywhere. The rest of us used to crawl between our blankets in our shirts and trousers. Not Harry. He never slept in anything but crisp, white pyjamas. And he slept between sheets. And in spite of the general squalor, the sheets and the pyjamas always appeared to be spotless. In the early morning he always shaved long before anyone else, and appeared spruce and fresh as if straight from a shower: his trousers were invariably well creased, and his boots shiny.<sup>9</sup>

Some officers became known for their quirks which men noticed and remembered. One had a big black umbrella, which he produced when the morale of his men was noticeably depressed. The effect was miraculous. “As they passed him there were cheers and shouts

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<sup>6</sup> NA WO 204/6702 *Morale and the Officer*, Forward

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Character of the Officer, p. 2

of laughter and everyone walked out of the village whistling and singing 'The Umbrella Man'.<sup>10</sup>

A good officer led by example. One walked "along through the fire, swinging his stick like he was out for a country stroll."<sup>11</sup> "Somehow one didn't feel frightened when the Colonel was there," wrote one Fusilier about his CO.<sup>12</sup> Any sensible person would run away from danger, and a junior officer in Italy acknowledged that:

Unless someone tells you to get out of your hole and go somewhere, you won't go. So I had to therefore show the way to my juniors and get up and go and tell them to come with me.<sup>13</sup>

An NCO who was a section commander agreed: "You've got to show willing, you've got to go first, which everyone is happy to let you do."<sup>14</sup> Men under stress exhibited the effects of the herd instinct when they were leaderless and if one man ran away, the rest might follow.<sup>15</sup> A good leader could prevent such behaviour. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The King's Regiment was in action across the River Gari on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1944, companies were unable to cross because the boats were being destroyed, casualties were high and communications were down. "Major Tuohy, although under heavy fire at the time, personally collected the remnants of the other Coys which had become disorganised owing to heavy casualties sustained, and withdrew them to his line of consolidation."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Craig, *The Broken Plume*, p. 75

<sup>9</sup> Majdalany, *The Monastery*, p. 29

<sup>10</sup> IWM 97/7/1 W. H. Mitchell Letter, 22 March 1944

<sup>11</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, p. 104

<sup>12</sup> Northcote Parkinson, *Always A Fusilier*, p. 197

<sup>13</sup> IWM Sound Archives 12239 G.K. Barnett, Reel 5

<sup>14</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16719 E. Grey, Reel 3

<sup>15</sup> Horsfall, *Fling Our Banner To The Wind*, p. 59

<sup>16</sup> NA WO 170/1418 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The King's Own Royal Regiment War Diary for May 1944

There were several occasions, at Salerno, when frightened soldiers ran away from the front line towards the beaches. When men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Fusiliers came under a tremendous barrage, which nearly overwhelmed their positions, 50-odd fled. They were met by an Intelligence Officer, who, with the help of two senior NCOs, sorted them out in a nearby field.<sup>17</sup> On another occasion, infantrymen trickling back down the road from the front asked an officer the way to the beaches. He told them they were going to wrong way and directed them back to the front line.<sup>18</sup> When the 6<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Guards were pinned down by strong German mortar fire at the Tobacco Factory near Battipaglia, the majority of one platoon fell dead and wounded. The survivors began running in spontaneous panic. “On their right, some Fusiliers of the 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade had a similar idea. By mid-afternoon the small roads were full of frightened soldiers, many retiring pell-mell regardless of officers.”<sup>19</sup> The runaways were eventually regrouped and a Guards officer was heard drilling them before they went back into the line.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of the steadying influence of officers was evident throughout the Salerno battle. When Lt.-Colonel John Whitfield, with the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Queen’s, for instance, was at Montecorvino airfield with his badly battered battalion, under heavy German artillery barrages, he ran from platoon to platoon, and spoke to all his men – 36 speeches in all. He told them: “We hold the airfield, which the enemy badly needs. I am certain he will attack tonight, tomorrow, or the next day. If the enemy does attack, it is our duty to ensure that he

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<sup>17</sup> Morris, *Salerno*, p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 218

<sup>19</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 109

<sup>20</sup> Selwyn, Davin, de Mauny, Fletcher (eds.), *From Oasis Into Italy*, p. 195

gains only a foothold over your dead bodies and mine. I have complete confidence in every one of you.”<sup>21</sup> The battalion never gave an inch during 10 days of constant shelling.

A good officer could inspire his men to continue fighting even when they had all but given up. At the beginning of December 1944, when morale throughout the Army was fragile, a platoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> Yorks & Lancs was ordered to assist some infantrymen holed up in a building surrounded by Germans, trying to get

our blokes to surrender. The Company Commander digested this bad news and told me to go to the sections of the platoon sheltering in an outbuilding. I found them sprawled against an inside wall. There was light from a shaded oil lamp. I sought out the section leader and told him the officer said “Get Dressed and Move Forward”. Morale hit rock bottom. They had come to the end. One or two enquired in worried tones, “What next?” Some were sobbing, too frightened to go out into the night. There was a lot of shelling and they said they were not going on. These men, in forward platoons over the months and years, had seen too many of their mates killed and wounded. They had gone through bouts of action in Tunisia, in Salerno, in the mountains in front of Cassino, and during the last four months of severe battles in the Gothic Line.

I went back to the officer and told him they had had it. He was drained, his eyes strained through lack of sleep and battle weariness. He went back with me to the barn. He began to persuade the frightened men that they were about to be relieved and this would be one of the last actions. He confirmed that the division was to go out for a long rest. He spoke gently and said that mutiny would be foolish as they were coming to the end of their stint. Also he pointed out some of our blokes were under threat and could be captured, and it was their job to rescue them. I expected bluster and threats of court martial from him but he handled an impossible situation with good sense. We were all shit scared, including him. We all went on together.<sup>22</sup>

If a good leader was killed, especially if he served as a father-figure and had gained the trust of the men under him, it adversely effected all the men. When the CO of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Royal Fusiliers was killed in May 1944, “the news of his death seemed to dampen the

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<sup>21</sup> Pond, *Salerno*, p. 132

<sup>22</sup> IWM 99/85/1 N. Wray, p. 199

spirits of everyone.” The battalion had been shelled and was suffering from severe casualties:

The CO remained behind to attend to the dead and wounded and sent the Bn away to the rest area. It was a great blow to the Bn to learn from the doctor and padre who had remained with the CO that the Colonel had himself been killed while attending to the wounded. Every man in the Bn had been so proud to serve under such a courageous and unselfish commander as he was ...<sup>23</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Bn Black Watch sincerely mourned the loss of a good officer:

The next morning we were told to move forward about 700-800 yds to come into line with the Irish Brigade of 78 Div. A great tragedy occurred here. Capt. D.R. MacArthur, the 2IC of ‘C’ Coy. and one of the finest officers in the bn, was hit by a bullet during the advance, and instantaneously killed..... His loss was deeply felt throughout the battalion...<sup>24</sup>

So, too, did the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion London Irish rifles when they lost their CO. “He had handled his Battalion with tremendous skill and energy ... and he had imported much of this and his own personal bravery to all the lads in the battalion.”<sup>25</sup> A couple of days later the battalion lost a Company Commander, killed within 15 minutes of a battle beginning. “His loss undoubtedly affected his men who had learned to adore this commander who so completely gave himself to the well-being of his men.”<sup>26</sup>

There is some indication that the loss of officers could affect desertions rates. The 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens’ general record of all absentees from August-December 1944, for instance, shows that the absentee rate in September was particularly high, with 16 absentees in just one day, September 18<sup>th</sup>. Eight days previously, the battalion had suffered high casualties, among them three officers killed and three wounded, one of whom later died of his wounds. Then, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, two companies tried to go forward against heavy small arms fire and

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<sup>23</sup> NA WO 170/1389 2nd Bn The Royal Fusiliers War Diary for May, 1944

<sup>24</sup> NA WO 170/1366 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Black Watch War Diary for May 1944

<sup>25</sup> NA WO 204/10425 “The Irish Brigade in Italy”, p. 21



again suffered heavy casualties: 'A' Company lost all its officers (wounded) while 'C' Company lost one officer and one Sergeant Platoon Commander killed.<sup>27</sup>

A good officer was "one that regards his men as an asset, never talks down to the men. He knows who you are, he knows what you do, he never looks down on you.... They were terrified, like we were, but they still went forward."<sup>28</sup> A good officer was someone who did not panic, who did not show that he was worried, and looked after his men. "You can tell when you've got a good, efficient officer who knows what he's doing. A man that can turn round to a Commanding Officer and say that he cannot take this position until he gets what he wants. ... not going bullheaded into a situation and losing half his company."<sup>29</sup> He "doesn't wave his pistol and push men ever forward. He knows when to withdraw".<sup>30</sup>

A good officer was a fair officer, who treated himself and his men equally. In one incident an officer struck a private who did not want to go into the line. The private agreed to go, but the major put himself on a charge for striking the private. The case did not go ahead: the private refused to press charges, saying that the major had been right to hit him and he was now a good soldier.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> NA WO 204/10425 "The Irish Brigade in Italy", p. 24

<sup>27</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for September 1944

<sup>28</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16719 E. Grey, Reel 4

<sup>29</sup> IWM Sound Archives 10421 L. Thornton, Reel 23

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, Reel 21

<sup>31</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13080 J. Corr, Reel 5

## II

It was reported that in general, in Italy, relations between officers and men were good in forward units.<sup>32</sup> The most important officer in the front line with regard to morale was a platoon commander.

You often find that one Company (or Platoon) has a bad reputation... When this is so, it is always the fault of the officers, for the men are[the] same value.<sup>33</sup>

Platoon commanders had to take on a great deal of responsibility, often at an age when their contemporaries before the war would have been enjoying life at university or just starting out on the career ladder.

The hardest rank for commissioned officers is platoon commander, because he takes the big patrols, but he does everything forward. His boss, the company commander, is back at company headquarters, so the three platoon commanders are up with the three platoons. They take the rough edge. Plus, he's got the platoon tactics, he's got to do it all. The thing people don't keep in mind when they criticize officers – they weren't much older than us, platoon commanders, but they had a hell of a lot of responsibility for 21 or 22 year olds. I have a lot of admiration for them.<sup>34</sup>

Platoon commanders also suffered the highest casualty rates amongst officers, and their replacement, especially in the later stages of the war, by men who were not infantrymen, might have had a detrimental effect on morale. New officers, especially those transferred from non-infantry units, often found it extremely difficult to make the battle-hardened ORs they commanded follow them:

He was a very smart young man but he'd been transferred over from the Royal Artillery so he'd done no infantry training. Consequently, when he took over the platoon he was forever on about, "Fix bayonets!" and this, that and the other. Of course the old soldiers just told him where to go, because you just didn't fix bayonets and charge. But he'd read it up and he was trying to do

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<sup>32</sup> NA WO 32/15772 War Office Morale Committee Reports, The Army Overseas, June-August 1944, p. 18

<sup>33</sup> IWM 97/7/1 W. H. Mitchell Letter, 29 May 1944

<sup>34</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16593 T. Chadwick, Reel 8

everything by the book. Weeks later he was into the groove and he was a first class officer.<sup>35</sup>

Most new officers shaped up well with a little practical experience. One CO noted:

The new officers had a Tactical Exercise under the 2nd in Comd. One of the objects of this exercise was to find out what they know. It was again encouraging to discover that their Basic or Book Knowledge of elementary tactics and order giving was reasonably sound. If they can be taught a little leadership and be given a chance to develop some self confidence there is no reason why they should not do well.<sup>36</sup>

Some, however, did not. "Our fighting patrol was taken out by a new officer. It was a failure because the officer did not make a proper plan, nor maintain control of his party."<sup>37</sup>

### III

A bad officer was "someone who took care of himself rather than his men."<sup>38</sup> "The worst possible situation in the line is a body of troops led by a neurotic officer. Troops that have fought well under another break and run when under an officer they know to be himself abnormally nervous and vacillating."<sup>39</sup> Unsuitable officers could demoralise even the best units. In Sicily, "The platoon officer had decided to prepare to face the night his own way with the help of a bottle of gin. It must have come ashore as part of his 'battle order kit', and his quick round of the trenches did nothing to boost our confidence, and in our minds we rehearsed our own action for survival if the attack did come."<sup>40</sup>

In December 1943, when a battle patrol from the 6<sup>th</sup> Yorks & Lancs was sent out to a farm to find out the strength of the enemy there, the whole battalion was caught in a heavy

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<sup>35</sup> Sgt. Tommy Cooper, C Coy, 16<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry, quoted in Hart, *The Heat of Battle*, p. 168

<sup>36</sup> NA WO 170/1401 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Hertfordshire Regiment War Diary for December 1944

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> IWM Sound Archives 12825 T. Lister, Reel 10

<sup>39</sup> Copp & McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, p. 54

<sup>40</sup> IWM 92/1/1/ C. Richard Eke, p. 33

German artillery barrage. Two of the signallers dived into the Company Commander's sangar.

In dived the Company Commander. The curt bastard told us to get out. It was his hole. No way! We ignored him. Slowly the shelling eased off. No more firing from the patrol. ....The [patrol] men trickled back to our H.Q. area, shocked, some shaking. The walking wounded were moved back through us to the M.O. at Battalion H.Q. The rest sat dazed and quiet in an irregular line. Out of the Sanger [sic] came the Company Commander asking questions but getting few replies from the spent soldiers. The Lieutenant Patrol Leader now on the scene was as yet unable to give a coherent account to the Captain's badgering. Up bustled the Colonel. He told the Company Commander to join him in the sangar. What went on in there we could only guess. A few weeks later the Company Commander left the battalion. As it became light I have a recollection of the Colonel with his arm round the patrol leader, coaxing gently a response, anxious to know the details of the clash with the enemy round the farms.<sup>41</sup>

In the worst-case scenario, a bad officer could provoke mutiny. Towards the end of 1944, a 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry NCO was passing on an order from an officer with a reputation for wasting his men:

I ordered the men to get their kit on and I was told very, very sharply, in a most soldierly manner, that they weren't going to get their fucking kit on and old ... [the officer] could fuck himself. They weren't going to get themselves killed for that stupid cunt. They were absolutely unanimous. They really felt very strongly. However, you can't run an army on this basis. So I said I would shoot them and they very reluctantly got up. They had no confidence in the Company Commander, they had seen their platoon commander turn and run and we had suffered casualties, unnecessary casualties...<sup>42</sup>

#### IV

But despite the examples above, most men seem to have had confidence in their officers. Censorship reports indicated that relations between officers and men were generally good. Some young officers sent out from the UK were judged far too green by senior officers, and Morale Committee reports noted that "newly commissioned officers still know little of

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<sup>41</sup> IWM 99/85/1 N. Wray, p. 128

<sup>42</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13251 K.C. Lovell, Reel 20

man-management” and “some instances still come to light of junior officers being out of touch and out of sympathy with their men.”<sup>43</sup> Overall, however, the Chief Administrative officer, AAI, Major-General Robertson, felt that the quality of junior officers was “remarkably good in view of the circumstances.”<sup>44</sup>

Writing about the officer selection process, Colonel R. M. Rendel, the President of a War Office Selection Board, reflected that around 90% of officers selected by the WOSB were regarded by Commanding Officers as ‘wholly satisfactory’.<sup>45</sup> He continued:

What is a fighting subaltern, and what is it that a W.O.S.B. has been asked to do? It has been asked to consider all manner of men, men of different ages, education, environment, experience and even nationality, and to decide which of them is capable of being in some sort a judge, in some sort a doctor, in some sort a father, a brother, a schoolmaster, and at the same time a stern master of men. All these he has to be under conditions of the greatest difficulty imposed on him not only by circumstances over which he has no control, but deliberately imposed by a ruthless enemy and all the hazards of War, so that he must make quick, calm decisions involving the lives of his men and the success of the cause for which he is fighting when he is hungry and thirsty and tired and sleepy, wet, cold and even possibly afraid.<sup>46</sup>

The 10% of unsuitable officers were, hopefully, weeded out before they could do too much harm to a unit’s morale.

## V

Non-combatant officers also played their part in maintaining morale, taken in its wider connotation of wellbeing. Army chaplains were responsible not only for the spiritual welfare of their flock, but also for the men’s mental and physical comfort and morale. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry maintained that the fact that they had only one

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<sup>43</sup> NA WO 32/15772 War Office Morale Committee Reports, The Army Overseas, June-August 1944, p. 18; NA WO 163/162 War Office Committee on Morale Draft Report of the Committee The Army Overseas March to May, 1944, p. 3

<sup>44</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 23

<sup>45</sup> CMAC, GC/192/18, Colonel R.M. Rendel, “Some Reflections by a President of a W.O.S.B.”, p. 3.

man missing on the beachhead “Sgt Musson – who is popularly reported to be a PW - is a great tribute to our Chaplain, the Rev. W.J. Hill,” while the Irish Guards took great comfort from the sight of their Padre, Father Brookes walking up and down with a steel helmet perched on top of his cap reading his breviary.<sup>47</sup> Not all army chaplains were as well regarded:

Most of them felt out of place; when things started to happen everyone except the padre knew exactly what they had to do, unpleasant though it might be, and they did not want any interference however well intentioned. One padre tried to be ‘one of the boys’, swearing and telling dirty jokes; it was embarrassing, there was only one way to gain the men’s respect that was never to ask them to do anything you were not prepared to do yourself.<sup>48</sup>

Many chaplains carried out their pastoral duties in difficult situations. As one soldier put it: “It’s a day to day existence, what day or date it is matters little; shells can drop just as easily on a Sunday as on a Tuesday and the padre holds a service wherever possible.”<sup>49</sup> It could also be a dangerous job. “We seemed unlucky with out Padres, for this was our second in six months. Both were killed by shellfire.”<sup>50</sup>

A chaplain held no official rank, the idea being the soldiers could talk to him in confidence in a way they might not do with an officer. “Most of their work seemed to consist of writing letters to the relations of those who had not survived – a miserable task.”<sup>51</sup> They did, however, often also see to the men’s, or battalion’s, more immediate welfare needs. One battalion diary recorded that “The Padre did some sterling work by going to Arezzo to the CRU and fetching back some of the ex-hospital cases, among whom was our highly

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> NA WO 170/1411 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Diary for May 1944; Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 64

<sup>48</sup> IWM 94/8/1 I. Mackay, p. 80

<sup>49</sup> IWM 83/36/1 R.H. Day, p. 24

<sup>50</sup> IWM 81/10/1 H. Buckle, p. 110

<sup>51</sup> IWM 94/8/1 I. Mackay, p. 80

valued and much tried ORQM.”<sup>52</sup> And a Morale Report noted that “Padres’ rooms are amongst the most popular features of large clubs,” while another Morale Report noted that “The padres, medical and nursing officers are especially praised.”<sup>53</sup>

The Medical Officer had to maintain the health, both physical and mental, of a battalion, but he also had responsibilities with regard to the battalion’s fighting ability.

Attendance rates of the M.I. Room fluctuate with the morale of units as well as with the exposure to a variety of other risks. The Medical Officer, like every other officer, has the duty of steering a middle course between undue sternness and over-benevolence towards those in his care. By sternness he will deter men from approaching him until their sickness is advanced. By softness he will lower morale by encouraging men to give in to minor complaints. ...Individual and group morale may be lowered by many causes. Some of these can be entirely eliminated by the Medical Officer ... The Medical Officer is the C.O.’s adviser in all matters of health, efficiency and morale.<sup>54</sup>

The Southborough Committee had acknowledged that “a good medical officer can not only anticipate many cases of exhaustion neurosis in individuals, but can feel the pulse of the unit as a whole.”<sup>55</sup> It also acknowledged that, more often than not, it was the NCO who first spotted something wrong.

Those are the men, of course, who are the first to notice anything, the Colour-Sergeant, the Corporal in his room, the Sergeant in his Company, those are the men, and they would at once go to the Company officer, or, as I know very well from experience, to the medical officer and say: “Beg pardon, sir, I do not like the look of Private so-and-so, lately he has been funny in his manner. His room-mates have told me so and so.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> NA WO 170/1416 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King’s Shropshire Light Infantry War Diary for August 1944

<sup>53</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter Ending 31 August 1944, p. 6: NA WO 32/15772 The Morale Committee, The Army Overseas, June-August, 1944, p. 18

<sup>54</sup> NA WO 222/218 Morale, Discipline & Mental Fitness: Circular to MOs from AMD II, p. 2 (n.d.)

<sup>55</sup> The Southborough Committee, Active Service Period, p. 151

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, Lt-Gen Sir John Goodwin, p. 184

## VI

NCOs were the “backbone of the British Army.”<sup>57</sup> If the role of the officer was to provide leadership, “the role of the Warrant Officers and NCOs was to provide supervision.”<sup>58</sup> They provided an interface between officers and ORs, transmitting orders from above and keeping officers apprised, as already indicated, about the mood of the men. They were the day-to-day template of how a soldier should behave. On the Garigliano front a Regimental Sergeant Major from the Inniskillings

who, like all of us busy with his various duties and being blown about by the odd shell, emerged every morning from his little trench as smartly dressed as it he were about to take a drill parade: boots shining, gaiters whitened and brass buckles gleaming ... In my eyes he was to good order and military discipline what Einstein was to science.<sup>59</sup>

Regular Army formations, the Guards Brigade, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions, tended, at the beginning of the campaign at any rate, to have lower desertion rates. These units had strong traditions of service, strong esprit de corps, and the NCOs who survived from before the war, provided the strong, disciplined core of their battalions.

A soldier of the ‘Old School’, Sgt Matheson was hard as nails and thoroughly reliable. Sound as a bell in action too ... On reflection now, I realise more and more what good soldiers they were from the days of the late 30s and early 40s. There was a stamp of efficiency on them: brought about no doubt by stern discipline. It stood them in good stead again and again.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> D. French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 147

<sup>59</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 171

<sup>60</sup> IWM 81/10/1 H.Buckle, p. 98



A good NCO would steady the nerves of junior officers as well as ORs. "If you had a good sergeant, you usually had a good officer."<sup>61</sup> One Fusilier remembered that, on the bank of the Garigliano:

Sgt. Mills discussed our next move with our platoon Commander. The latter was a young man of about twenty years of age. He was a tank officer temporarily on loan to an infantry battalion. I wondered what his thoughts would be leading an infantry platoon with the knowledge that his two immediate predecessors had both been killed. In Sgt. Mills we had an ideal man to help boost his confidence.<sup>62</sup>

A young lieutenant, just coming up to his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in the days before the summer Cassino offensive, remembered his NCOs: "The Troop Sergeant was Jim Beresford, a Regular soldier, and McGrogan was the Corporal – a very fine pair of N.C.O.s to whom I was to owe a debt of gratitude for all that they did to educate me in the mysteries of troop leading and who gave me their complete loyalty during the future trying times and dangers we shared."<sup>63</sup> One man remembered the reaction of his sergeant-major when he returned to his unit after being wounded:

"Hello, Sergeant-Major," I said ... he turned towards me – then he saw – the delight, which came over his face, as he recognised me was unmistakable. He .. grabbed my hand, and proceeded to pump it vigorously. I've always been a little embarrassed in such circumstances but the glow of pleasure I felt then far outweighed it. Sergeant-Major Davison made me feel like I'd come home after a long, long absence.<sup>64</sup>

Sergeant-Majors were the butt of jokes, loathed, perhaps grudgingly respected, but their importance to the cohesion of any unit was undeniable. They also held a special place in the ORs' pantheon of pet hates. "All Sergeant-Majors develop a Sergeant-Major look," explained one soldier. "This takes the form of a tracer-eyed, tight-lipped, completely humourless and aggressive expression on all their faces." The root cause of this look was

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<sup>61</sup> IWM Sound Archives 12825 T. Lister, Reel 10

<sup>62</sup> IWM 80/46/1 G. Allnutt, p. 56

because the Sergeant-Majors were lonely. "Sergeant-Majors never have friends, except amongst other Sergeant-Majors, which means, as there is only one of them to a company, for all practical purposes they are completely friendless. Ordinary Sergeants, at the rate of about five to a company, have friends ... but not Sergeant-Majors."<sup>65</sup>

## VII

The difference in working relations and interaction between officers, NCOs and ORs, or even between men of the same rank, was marked between the front and the rear. In the front line, relations tended towards the informal. "The smouldering friction between the commissioned ranks and the common soldiers in England, was soon replaced by a man to man relationship. Survivors knew each other better as the battles took their toll. *Esprit de Corps* grew from privates to colonels."<sup>66</sup> The same was true of the relationship between ORs and NCOs.

You can't compare war-time NCOs with peace-time NCOs. It's a totally different discipline, a totally different ball game altogether. By and large... the experience they'd gained in the job they were doing at the time... they were very good. The lads I had the pleasure to serve with had that tact of man-management, but there was no 'Corporal Sir' and spring to attention, it was 'Bill' or 'Joe' up to sergeant, then you called him 'Sarg'. A different discipline in action.<sup>67</sup>

An infantry sergeant who was seconded away from his fighting battalion for a short while was struck particularly by the formal atmosphere that existed in the rear:

As most of the men who were on the staff were either Serjeants or Warrant Officers, the Serjeants Mess was enormous but I noticed that the atmosphere was very different from the fighting units and that hardly anyone spoke to anyone else, although they might be working with them all day. One day there was quite sufficient for me.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> IWM 98/3/1 H.A. J. Stiebel "The War Story", Part Two, Italy, p. 18

<sup>64</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, p. 118

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 108

<sup>66</sup> IWM 99/85/1 N. Wray, p. 189

<sup>67</sup> IWM Sound Archives 16593 T. Chadwick, Reel 5

<sup>68</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 247

## VIII

One officer believed that each officer up the chain of command should be able to inspire those men under him. From the lowliest subaltern to the army commander, "A single break in the 'chain of inspiration' and you get tired and dispirited troops."<sup>69</sup> A Corps commander should therefore be able to inspire his Divisional commanders. At Anzio, the American commander, General Lucas, failed to encourage his British subordinates: he seldom visited them, in fact he rarely came out of his cellar at all.<sup>70</sup> It was noticeable to many commentators that the further away from the front – or as far as one could get at Anzio – the lower the morale.<sup>71</sup> Lucas was tired when he arrived at Anzio and it has been suggested that he was suffering from exhaustion.<sup>72</sup> He was replaced by General Lucian Truscott on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1944. "The knowledge that Truscott was at the helm had a heartening effect on the men holding responsible positions on the beachhead ... there was an air of confidence blowing through the underground corridors of Sixth Corps."<sup>73</sup> Truscott, himself, had an above-ground office in Nettuno. It was not only American commanders who were moved on: when the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Br) Infantry Brigade commander was judged to be no longer capable of doing his job, he was replaced.<sup>74</sup> Divisional Commanders were also replaced.

General Keightley had been promoted to G.O.C. of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps at the beginning of August [1944], and unfortunately this had left the 78<sup>th</sup> Division in a period of interregnum at a time when a sure hand on the helm was desperately needed ...one was heading for trouble with the dismemberment of formations and frequent changes of command.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> IWM 97/7/1 W.H. Mitchell, Letter, 29 May 1944

<sup>70</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, p. 79

<sup>71</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 147

<sup>72</sup> In his examination of fatigue in war, Dr. Hugh L'Etang suggests that 'fatigue may have settled the fate of General John P. Lucas' – quoted in J. Stockman, *Seaforth Highlanders 1939-45: A Fighting Soldier Remembers* (Somerton, Somerset: Crecy Books, 1987), p. 160

<sup>73</sup> Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p. 200

<sup>74</sup> A.M. Cheetham, *Ubique* (Formby: Freshfield Books, 1987) p. 147, and LHCMA, Penney Papers

<sup>75</sup> Horsfall, *Fling our Banner to the Wind*, p. 201

The appointment of a new Divisional Commander, Major-General Butterworth, a senior major-general who had spent most of the war in a lower establishment division in England and who had not had any combat experience since Dunkirk, adversely influenced the morale of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division. News of the in-coming commander filled the officers with some apprehension for they wondered what a Home Forces general knew about real war.

An officer recalled one of the first training workouts:

The General elected to hold a grand divisional cloth model exercise to bring us up to speed in advance and attack. Now if there was one thing that the Division prided itself on it was its efficiency as a follow-up division and its ability to pursue and drive the enemy before it. Our standard operating procedures were well practised and honed to a 'T', and our co-operation between all arms was second to none. Furthermore our previous divisional commanders had been first class generals inspiring confidence in their battle plans.

Everything the general said showed that even the most junior officer there knew more about the Germans and their way of fighting, about battle procedures and the realities of Italian topography, than he did. I shall never forget sensing the disappointment and dropping morale throughout the hall as the event proceeded and the grim looks superseding the eager anticipation with which it started. It was as though a dark cloud of calamity had settled upon us all.<sup>76</sup>

"Butterworth," wrote the Corps Commanding Officer, General Kirkman, "was an officer with much experience as a Div Comdr in England, but none in fighting. He failed and I sent him away on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct."<sup>77</sup> There was also some question as to the fitness of the new commander appointed to 56<sup>th</sup> Division at the beginning of 1945:

I am not quite happy that Whitfield is the man to get 56 Division back into first-class form. There is no doubt he is, I think, a bit above his ceiling commanding a Division. This Division has many good qualities and a very fine fighting record since Salerno, but it has had a very hard time, losses have been exceptionally heavy, particularly at Anzio and in the Gothic Line battles, and an outstanding man is required for this Division. Their desertion problem is a very serious one.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Ford, *Battleaxe Division*, pp. 189-90

<sup>77</sup> Hand written note by General Kirkman in his copy of Horsfall's *Fling our Banner to the Wind*.

The whole ethos of an Army could be shaped by its Commander. To many, Montgomery *was* the Eighth Army. He believed that a Commander should know and be known personally by his troops, and that a “successful Army becomes like a large family. Everyone knows ‘the form’ and they know each other. Above all they must know the head of the family, i.e. the Army Commander.”<sup>79</sup> Montgomery’s morale-raising visits to his troops always followed the same pattern. He would gather the men around his car and tell them how well they looked, and ask whether they were getting sufficient NAAFI supplies. Prior to the Sicily invasion Major Sym remembered that when Monty (who liked being called that by his troops, since he thought it showed that a great bond of faith existed between him and them<sup>80</sup>) visited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Seaforth Highlanders:

He began by congratulating us on being chosen to lead the allied attack on Europe, he then said that opinion was divided as to whether Italians were or were not good fellows that that anyway it did not concern us. They had entered the war of their own free will at a critical period, if things were now going against them, they had asked for it and must take the consequences. Our job was to kill them first and ask questions afterwards. He looked round and picking out several badges asked men where they came from. He twitted us Scotsmen and the Londoners saying he would rather be where he was than in Scotland or London. There was no doubt about his popularity with the men as they showed when I called for three cheers for the Army Commander.<sup>81</sup>

Another man recalls that Monty “addressed all officers and made a tremendous impression on me. He vowed that he would never commit his troops to battle unless he was assured of success – that was his contribution to morale.”<sup>82</sup> When Montgomery visited the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn London Irish Rifles, which had just joined the 50<sup>th</sup> Division from PAIFORCE, “all ranks

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<sup>78</sup> National Army Museum, Harding MSS 8908/144/4, McCreery to Harding, 4 January 1945

<sup>79</sup> LHCMA W/C/ 20/9 Major Munroe Sym, Part II, p. 58; Brooks (ed.), *Montgomery*, p. 269

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> LHCMA, W/C 20/9 Major Munroe Sym, Part II, pp. 58-9.

<sup>82</sup> IWM 99/19/1 B. Westcott, *My War*, p. 24

were extremely pleased by his visit and there was a noticeable rise in morale – already extremely high – when it was realised that the Bn was to be in his Army.”<sup>83</sup>

But Montgomery was received less than enthusiastically by 78<sup>th</sup> Division, who felt that their contribution in the First Army to the North African campaign was belittled by Eighth Army. “When he told the veterans of 78 Division, who had almost taken Tunis within three days of landing at Algiers, that they should feel proud to be joining the Eighth Army, the temperature dropped below freezing in a second.”<sup>84</sup> They were to chalk up on many of their trucks in Sicily the words: “Nothing to do with Eighth Army.”<sup>85</sup> Yet, when he had visited the Division in June, Dick Spurgin (78<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery) noted that “the men had never met any officer of high rank with a personality quite like that of General Montgomery before, and there is no doubt that they were delighted with his free and easy way of talking to them.”<sup>86</sup> When Monty visited the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (78<sup>th</sup> Division) at their concentration area near Hammamet in July 1943, one officer noted in his diary that:

He was very complimentary about the Division, and his theme was that he will never embark on any operation unless he has got everything he wants to do the job properly; that he will never start until he is ready in spite of Winston trying to force his hand, and finally the fact that once he has started an operation it is bound to succeed ... I think most of the troops are very impressed by his manner of speaking to them, though Robert Gill overheard the following conversation between two of his troops after a Monty talk: “Stirring stuff that, Bill,” said the one. “Stirring arseholes!” replied the other.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> NA WO 169/10254 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for June 1943

<sup>84</sup> D. Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989) p. 55

<sup>85</sup> Pond, *Sicily*, p. 162

<sup>86</sup> IWM 02(410.654[Royal Artillery Field Regt]/5-2 99/392 R. Spurgin, “With the British 78<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery”, p. 79

However they regarded him, Monty gave his Army what it needed: he gave his men the morale-boosting prestige and recognition that they craved if they were to continue fighting. One journalist at the time wrote: "His compact with his troops is a straight business proposition; they gave him their best and in return he gives them victory and its attendant glory."<sup>88</sup>

His successor, General Sir Oliver Leese, did not have the same deft hand with his Army. His pre-Gothic Line exhortation was the most costly example of an own-goal in the whole of the Italian campaign. Oliver Leese, one 46<sup>th</sup> Division doctor remembered, told his officers and soldiers that his plan was to get to the Lombardy Plain and Vienna by Christmas, 1944.<sup>89</sup> Another officer, from 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens, recalled Leese addressing his battalion on the eve of battle and telling them that in two days they would be in Bologna, in four days Venice and seven days in Vienna.<sup>90</sup> Pat Scott, the CO of the Irish Brigade, wrote: "We had been encouraged by the idea that the war was ending; that the Hun was pulling out; that he had 'had it' and didn't intend to fight any more, that he was going back to the Po as hard as he could leg it, if not beyond."<sup>91</sup> Eric Linklater was later to term this optimism "curious."<sup>92</sup> Eric Morris believed that "Alexander's generals displayed a confidence that bordered on fantasy. They believed the Gothic Line could be assaulted on the run, so to speak."<sup>93</sup> It was extremely dangerous for morale, which was artificially

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<sup>87</sup> IWM 90/20/1. J.K. Windeatt, *Very Ordinary Soldier*, based on diaries and produced privately by the Oriel Press, Exeter, 1989

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in d'Este, *Bitter Victory*, p. 98

<sup>89</sup> IWM 91/16/1 Captain H.M. Jones, *Italy and Austria July 1944-November 1945*

<sup>90</sup> Doherty, *A Noble Crusade*, Footnote, p. 240.

<sup>91</sup> NA WO 204/10425 "The Irish Brigade in Italy", Part II, p. 5

<sup>92</sup> Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy*, p. 368

<sup>93</sup> Morris, *Circles of Hell*, p. 371

heightened and, as one contemporary put it, “If the war is not over this year the big shots will get a shock.”<sup>94</sup> He was prescient.

Operation OLIVE, the plan to breach the Gothic Line, was put into effect on August 25<sup>th</sup> 1944. At first the attack seem to be going well, with the enemy taken by surprise, but by the beginning of September the Germans were once again, with their usual determination and efficiency, spoiling the advance. The first and second battles for the Coriano and Gemmano Ridges, and the village of Croce, a mile north of the Gemmano Ridge (September 4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> and September 12<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 1944) involved some of the heaviest fighting Eighth Army had yet experienced.<sup>95</sup> The battles were a planning fiasco, a fact which one usually circumspect battalion diary was happy to comment upon.

It is interesting to note that over a period of nine days nine different Bns from three different Divs were concerned in the action ... Without presuming to criticize the higher plan which was working under two very great difficulties – firstly the impossibility of finding suitable assembly areas for Bns without getting some elbow room in which to do it and, secondly, the congestion of the roads in the Montefiore area which was constantly under harassing fire, one big fact does emerge.

The task of attacking [the] feature required either a fresh Bn unhampered by any other commitments or a concerted plan....<sup>96</sup>

But these were just the beginning of a series of bitter engagements. The 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens reported that “there is evidence that the Bosche has pulled back. The term ‘he is pulling out’ is not used with the Bn much these days – mention of this phrase usually brings down

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<sup>94</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter Ending 31 August 1944

<sup>95</sup> NA CAB 106/427 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part III, The Campaign in the Northern Apennines. p. 12

<sup>96</sup> NA WO 170/1412 2/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Diary for September 1944



a stonk..."<sup>97</sup> The joke current in the 8<sup>th</sup> Army at the time was that Jerry was retreating, "but he's taking the last ridge with him."<sup>98</sup>

The early pre-Gothic Line over-optimism which had infected the Army from the top downwards soon turned to pessimism. The advance was obviously not proceeding along the lines originally envisaged and the lack of success dramatically lowered morale. The failure of the Allied armies to exploit their initial success at the Gothic Line and debouch from the mountains condemned the soldiers to a miserable static winter in conditions far worse than any they had experienced before. "Worse than the Sangro, worse than the snowy wastes of the Central Appenines, worse even than Cassino."<sup>99</sup>

Dr. Tim Elliot, who until the end of 1944 commanded a company of the 214<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance in 56<sup>th</sup> Division, believed that the main reason for the depression at the end of 1944 could be traced back to Leese's pre-Gothic Line Operation speech when he suggested that the Allies would be sweeping into Austria in six weeks. This supposedly morale-boosting speech had a disastrously negative effect when the soldiers found themselves once again suffering through another Italian winter. Indeed, many of the men who had suffered through the 1943/44 winter began to wonder how often the cycle of spring offensive and winter stalemate would be repeated.<sup>100</sup>

Certainly the front line soldier, wallowing in mud, shivering in sub-zero temperatures, drenched by freezing rain and sleet, manning his shallow slit trench or crawling into the doubtful hospitality of his flimsy bivouac to the cold comfort of sodden blankets, without heat, without light and very nearly devoid

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<sup>97</sup> NA WO 170/1466 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944

<sup>98</sup> Orgill, *The Gothic Line*, p. 141

<sup>99</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, p. 193

<sup>100</sup> NA WO 106/3975 Directorate of Military operations and Military Intelligence: Operations in Italy, 1944 June-1945 June GSO1 Report, 30 January 1945

of hope that his tribulations would ever end – the fighting soldier, I say – had forthright, not to say forceful, views on the strategy which condemned him to that dreadful winter of hardship and suffering.<sup>101</sup>

The final victory, “the most unlikely miracle in military history,” according to Brian Harpur, has been attributed to new High Command appointments in December.<sup>102</sup> General Alexander took over as Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Forces, on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1944, and Mark Clark moved up to take Alexander’s place as Commander. Fifteenth Army Group. Command of Fifth (US) Army devolved to Lucian Truscott, while at Eighth Army Lt.-General Richard McCreery had taken over from Oliver Leese in September. According to Harpur, each man had something to prove. Alexander wanted to get to Vienna before the Russians. Mark Clark needed to prove he was a great commander. General Truscott needed to be his own man, out from Clark’s shadow, and prove he could do at army level what he had done so successfully at divisional level. McCreery “had perhaps the greatest personal ambition of them all”, because it was unthinkable that he should be the one to lead the famous Eighth Army “shuffling into obscurity rather than marching to the matchless victory which its final days deserved.”<sup>103</sup> “Fortunately,” commented McCreery, “Alexander, Mark Clark, Truscott and I were united in our purpose of achieving a total victory in Italy.”<sup>104</sup>

## IX

Training and discipline were the officers’ responsibility and, according to the Southborough Committee, training was of particular importance in forming both individual and corporate morale. “Morale is confidence in one’s self and confidence in

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<sup>101</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, p. 193

<sup>102</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 101

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, pp. 101-2

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.124

one's comrades....It is the product of continuous and enthusiastic training."<sup>105</sup> Discipline, according to *Morale and the Officer*, too often "means only punishment; fatigues, whitewash, eye wash and so forth. Nothing could be further from the truth."

... Discipline implies the teaching of certain rules of behaviour which experience has shown are necessary for the efficiency of the soldier and the efficiency of the army to which he belongs. When these rules have been learnt, they must be observed. There are do and do not rules. The majority are the do variety.

Disciplined troops were those who had been taught their trade and remembered what they had been taught, and put it into practice throughout the whole course of a battle. "Neither individual bravery nor mass bravery make up for lack of discipline."<sup>106</sup> The key to a disciplined response from the men was training. "A high standard of training results in confidence, and confidence results in morale – the biggest battle-winning factor of all."<sup>107</sup> Most battalions trained whenever they had the opportunity. Towards the end of the war the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was faced with the situation that two-thirds of some of the rifle companies were reinforcements and, as the Division had been in continuous action with usually at least six battalions deployed, it was not easy for COs to organize even basic training.<sup>108</sup> The shortage of manpower meant that battalions were often kept in an indefinite state of readiness, at 24 hours' notice to move, an unsatisfactory state of affairs which prevented them from training properly.<sup>109</sup> As much training as possible was, however, organised. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions did have time out of the line for rest and training towards the end of 1944. Hardening up and general fitness were emphasized: for the first time

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<sup>105</sup> The Southborough Committee, *Creation of Morale*, p. 208

<sup>106</sup> NA WO 214 /6702 "Morale and the Officer", Section II, Discipline, p. 3

<sup>107</sup> NA WO 170/1487 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The North Staffordshire Regiment War Diary for July 1944 Training Policy 15-31 July

<sup>108</sup> LHCMA (GB99KCLMA) General Sir Sidney Kirkman Letter to Lt. General Sir Richard McCreery, 15 December 1944

<sup>109</sup> NA WO 170/1366 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Black Watch War Diary for October 1944

battalion diaries mentioned the attachment of Physical Fitness instructors from the Army Physical Fitness Corps to units.<sup>110</sup>

General Kirkman of XIII Corps worried that the men under his command were reasonably efficient in defensive operations, but were largely untrained for major offensive action of moving warfare.<sup>111</sup> His view was echoed by one of the battalion COs. The 1<sup>st</sup> Herts' training programme for December 1944 included individual weapon handling and section Leading. "The Bn is very out of practice at Mobile Warfare and the standard of Section leading is extremely low."<sup>112</sup> 78<sup>th</sup> Division, which had become used to the problems presented by fighting in the mountains, needed training in river crossing and in mobile fighting, along with armour. The Lancashire Fusiliers reported that one week "the Bn was kept well occupied by its training programme which included Coy Schemes, boating, signal exercises and movement in Kangaroos." The following week "the Bn was engaged in further training, including night-time exercises, assault boating, the construction of a short Olafsen bridge by jeeps and anti-tank guns; street fighting exercises." The battalion was also visited by the Army Physical Training Staff.<sup>113</sup> The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders' training programme included gas training, wireless, training, patrolling night and day, section attacks, obstacle crossing, assault boat training, silent night attack, house clearing, route march, PT and range practice. They also had recreation training and lectures.<sup>114</sup> By

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<sup>110</sup> See, for instance, NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment War Diary for October

<sup>111</sup> LHCMA (GB99KCLMA) General Sir Sidney Kirkman Letter, 23 December 1944

<sup>112</sup> NA WO 170/1401 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Hertfordshire Regiment War Diary for December 1944

<sup>113</sup> NA WO 170/5033 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for March 1945

<sup>114</sup> NA WO 170/4988 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders War Diary for February 1945

February 14<sup>th</sup> 1945, the battalions of 78<sup>th</sup> Division were training hard, “and one heard the usual remarks expressed by people, wishing they were back in the line.”<sup>115</sup>

The Scots Guards enjoyed four weeks’ training, before the final offensive, in the Forli area, which had provided winter quarters for the bulk of army units in the Eighth Army sector. Physical fitness was again emphasised, and companies were expected to include in their training a 10-mile march in the first week of training, a 15-mile march in the second week and an 18-mile march in the third and fourth weeks. The CO also wanted NCOs to be trained to assume higher command at short notice, a not unreasonable consideration given the attrition rate among junior officers.<sup>116</sup>

The 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens decided that the emphasis in their training would be on physical fitness and for that purpose an assault course was built up in the mountains.

March 19<sup>th</sup>: The mountain villages where coys are staying for their 3 days’ training and general fitness are untouched by war. The scenery is beyond description, and the people themselves very hospitable. Eggs are plentiful. The men come back looking brown and very fit and the change of surroundings is good for morale. The scheme has caught on in the Bde since it has proved so successful

March 21<sup>st</sup>: The ground is excellent for training and the men show great keenness. If it is possible to get a company .... living out in the country for training there is never any lack of enthusiasm, and all ranks learn more readily this way.<sup>117</sup>

## X

At battalion level, officers were also concerned with other areas of soldiers’ lives such as recreational activities, sport and entertainment, which brought an element of normality into

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<sup>115</sup> NA WO 204/10435 “The Irish Brigade in Italy”, p. 37

<sup>116</sup> NA WO 170/4981 1st Bn Scots Guards Notes On Commanding Officer’s Conference, 12 March, War Diary for March 1945

<sup>117</sup> NA WO 170/5060 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for March 1945

the lives of front-line soldiers and re-affirmed their links with civilian society. Such activities could also enhance group cohesion and help mould the troops into an effective and efficient unit. One battalion diary noted, as soon as the unit came out of the line: "The Bn Entertainments Officer held a conference, representatives from each Coy attended. A meeting was held by the Sports Officer."<sup>118</sup> Sports encouraged physical fitness, especially for men who had been forced to lie still in the line for long period of time. They also fostered team spirit, so important between the veterans and the incoming reinforcements. "Sport provides a very important part of the soldier's recreation," commented a Morale Committee report, adding, "Football matches, of which both the players and the onlookers cannot have enough, are without doubt, extremely important for morale."<sup>119</sup> Football was of enduring interest to – and a great form of relaxation for – all soldiers. When the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn Queens had a few days rest at Salerno they immediately created a football pitch and challenged the brigade team to a match. The Queens won.<sup>120</sup> Some men even had a game of football under gun fire, and while waiting to move up the line.<sup>121</sup> Pioneers constructed two football pitches for use of the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queen's in October 1944.<sup>122</sup> For the real diehards of 46<sup>th</sup> Division, the UK footballs results were printed in the Divisional newspaper, *The Oak*.<sup>123</sup> Football was instrumental in maintaining the front-line camaraderie out of the line. On St. Patrick's Day, 1944 the Inniskillings organised an officers v. sergeants football match and some of the officers:

were certainly a sight for sore eyes. The C.O. was dressed in K.D. shirt and shorts, vivid socks, boots and Italian black coat, and a green port pie hat pulled down over on eye. Smudger was resplendent in khaki trousers, shirt and

<sup>118</sup> NA WO 170/1404 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for February 1944

<sup>119</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, Morale Report by the Assistant Chaplain-General, December 1944, Appendix 'A', Recreation and Amusements

<sup>120</sup> NA WO 169/10282 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for November 1943

<sup>121</sup> Hillier, *The Long Road to Victory*, p. 113; Horsfall, *Fling our Banner to the Wind*, p. 42

<sup>122</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944

<sup>123</sup> NA WO 169/10252 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for November 1943

beautiful net veil.... Badger Dicker appeared round the corner on a donkey, Stan Pollard riding pillion with black eye and adhesive tape [the result of the previous night's celebrations], and holding an enormous aspidestra.<sup>124</sup>

But it was not just football that was used to develop cohesive units. Rugby was also popular among many battalions, and basketball become quite a popular game. "Our rules are very much our own, and it helps to fill up games afternoon."<sup>125</sup> Even the snow in the mountains brought some compensation. Skiing became popular, but was not without its own danger:

Many persons were learning to ski for the first time and casualties from this activity were definitely higher than due to enemy action. A brigade skiing meeting was provisionally fixed for mid-February, but the snow had begun to melt by this time, so it never took place; this was perhaps fortunate!<sup>126</sup>

Battalions also organised boxing matches and whist drives.<sup>127</sup> Sport of a different nature – the Sport of Kings - was not forgotten either. "During the afternoon a Bn Race Meeting was held in the Arena near the MBU, this proved a great success. Prizes for the winners, runners up, and the best dressed jockey were distributed by the CO. It was generally felt that another meeting ought to be held in the future, the linings of some pockets are still bare."<sup>128</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry included a race meeting, The Redcar Races, in a Fete they arranged in the summer of 1944 which included "side shows of all types – Roll The Penny, etc – and a knockout football Competition which was won by A Coy.<sup>129</sup> Race Meetings were popular in the Queen's Brigade too. "Horses (wooden ones) are pulled by signal cable and side shows are built by the Pioneers who aptly name their horse

<sup>124</sup> NA WO 204/10425 "The Irish Brigade in Italy", Part I, p. 6

<sup>125</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for November 1944

<sup>126</sup> IWM 91/43/1 Major-General R.H. Whitworth, 24<sup>th</sup> Guards Brigade Operations August 1944 to May 1945, Chapter V, Static Operations in the M. Sole Sector, p. 40

<sup>127</sup> NA WO 170/1404 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for February, 1944

<sup>128</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for November 1944

<sup>129</sup> NA WO 170/1385 16<sup>th</sup> Bn The Durham Light Infantry War Diary for August 1944

‘Something out of Nothing by Pioneers’.”<sup>130</sup> 46<sup>th</sup> Division battalions preferred Fairs: The Lincolnshire Regiment recorded that the troops spent the morning preparing for the ‘Poacher Fair’. “An English fair ground was extremely well imitated and all the usual amusements and games could be enjoyed.”<sup>131</sup> The attractions included:

Poaching the Rabbit (Lincolnshire style), Poker Dice (as played by the backroom boys); Skittling for a Pig (if we can find a pig); Cock Fighting (a game of strength and skill; Tug of War (an open challenge by a team of seven men to any eight), darts competition, guessing competitions, quoits and booths.<sup>132</sup> Profits from the Poacher’s Fair – a grand total of £61.10/-, was spent on behalf of the battalion on fruit, eggs and NAAFI goods.<sup>133</sup>

In August 1944, the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Regiment was also Fair-inclined:

The Battle of Minden [a famous regimental victory] was celebrated in the Bn by a day of amusement and entertainment. A site in a field in the centre of the Bn area had been turned into a miniature Fair Ground – various stalls being arranged by all coys and sections of the Bn. During the afternoon ... a brisk trade was carried on at a snack bar arranged by the Cook Sjt. The evening saw the snack bar turned into a ‘vino’ bar ‘ with an “all star” Bn concert, followed by a presentation of prizes by the Commanding Officer for prizes won on the various stalls during the afternoon.<sup>134</sup>

At Anzio, where the lines between front and rear areas were blurred, off-duty men began to play five-a-side football, even though sometimes shellfire forced a sudden end to the game. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Northants started a football competition in April, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Seaforths organized inter-company football matches, and shooting competitions.<sup>135</sup> Shooting and sniper competitions were held throughout the beachhead as a means not only of raising morale but also of training. Sixth Corps ran a sniper competition won by a Cameronian rifleman. His prize was seven days’ leave away from the beach head and \$50.00.<sup>136</sup> Battalions

<sup>130</sup> NA WO 170/1466 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944

<sup>131</sup> NA WO170/1428 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for August 1944

<sup>132</sup> Ibid

<sup>133</sup> Ibid

<sup>134</sup> NA WO 170/1397 1/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for August 1944

<sup>135</sup> NA WO 170/1445 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment War Diary for April 1944; NA WO 170/1474 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Seaforth Highlanders War Diary for April 1944

<sup>136</sup> NA WO 170/1373 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Cameronians War Diary for April 1944 and *Beachhead News*, p. 1



organised Sports Days. The CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn York & Lancs won the egg and spoon race, and in another egg and spoon race, “there was great consternation among the competitors when they thought they would have to use powdered eggs. But the situation was saved by the substitution of onions.”<sup>137</sup>

Beetle racing was the sport that swept through the beachhead, attracting big crowds.

A large wooden tray, about four foot long, was divided by slats into five lanes. The large indigenous black beetles were collected and stabled in match boxes when not racing. The rules were simple. You first caught your beetle by digging a small slit-trench, and in an hour the bottom of the trench would be black with beetles, all struggling to get out. From the numerous runners you made careful tests to select the fastest mover: certain beetles gained fame on the Beachhead and changed ownership at high prices, the champion being sold for over three thousand lire. The lira stood at 50s or \$10 to the thousand, so this insect can claim to be one of the most expensive black beetles on record.

Colours were painted on the beetles' backs and they were paraded around the ring in jam-jars. When the bets were placed the jam-jar was dumped into the centre of a circle six feet square, the beetles came under 'starter's orders', the starter lifted the jar and the beetles made for the end of the ring. The first to cross the circles was the winner.

The Anzio 'bookies' brought off their smartest coup when they bought up the beetle which was far too consistent a winner at Divisional Headquarters races – and promptly stamped on it!<sup>138</sup>

There was also the Beachhead Racing Association, the proud possessor of mules, donkeys and horses, which ran the Anzio Derby. First prize was a can of 'C' rations and second place won a can of spaghetti and meatballs.<sup>139</sup>

## XI

Battalion Entertainments Officers became busier as the campaign progressed and positions in the winter of 1944-45 once again became static. “It is proposed to form a Bn Concert

<sup>137</sup> NA WO 170/1490 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The York & Lancaster Regiment War Diary for May 1944; NA WO 170/1373 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Cameronians War Diary for May 1944 Divisional Weekly News, 28 May 28, p. 4

<sup>138</sup> Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p. 216

Party,” noted the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queen’s war diary for October 1944. “Coys will render to the Entertainments Office names of those who are willing to perform. Returns should state experience and type of entertainment provided.”<sup>140</sup> The Morale Committee recognised that: “Unit shows, by the troops for the troops, are definite morale builders. The men who take part on them are very enthusiastic, and say without exception that they provide one of the most satisfactory methods of passing spare time. Audiences enjoy seeing their friends and acquaintances perform.”<sup>141</sup> “Coy concerts are now coming into vogue” wrote one diarist in October 1944. “The Bn [The Royal West Kents] produced a very good concert in which officers and men took part. A good time was had by all. The stage was constructed of wood covered by tarpaulin. Two 3-ton trucks each side formed very effective dressing rooms and also supplied very good stage lighting with the help of mortar boxes and reflectors.”<sup>142</sup> The 2/7<sup>th</sup> Queens organised a battalion concert in the form of a ‘Spot the Talent’ competition, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Lincolnshire Battalion War Diary recorded that “The Officers’ pantomime, with an all-star cast, was staged before a crowded house in the San Giorgio Opera House.”<sup>143</sup>

Battalions also arranged dances. The 6<sup>th</sup> Lincolns held a dance at a hotel in Urbino when they were staying there. “Relations were a little cold until the tea and buns arrived, but afterwards became a first class evening. The most entertaining event was the Paul Jones

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<sup>139</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, p. 237

<sup>140</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944 Battalion Orders, 17 October

<sup>141</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, Morale Report by the Assistant Chaplain-General, 4 December 1944, Appendix ‘A’, Recreation & Amusements.

<sup>142</sup> NA WO 1709/1419 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for October 1944

<sup>143</sup> NA WO 170/1467 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for October 1944; NA WO 170/1428 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for December 1944

when the females were actually herded into the centre.”<sup>144</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn King’s Shropshire Light Infantry held a less entertaining dance in the theatre at Borgo San Lorenzo. The Regimental Band played, but it was ruined because “local Fascists prevented any girls from attending. Nurses from F.D.S. and C.C.S. saved the Dance from being a complete ‘flop’.”<sup>145</sup>

Other recreational amenities were organised at battalion level as well. In the summer of 1944, the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Leicestershire Regiment was training, and was confined to the camp area. For the men’s recreation, an empty house was taken over and organised into the “Tiger Arms” [a reference to the regimental nickname] where wine was served under battalion arrangements. “It is hoped to assemble an orchestra of some kind to play during the evening.”<sup>146</sup> The CO of the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal West Kents decided to open an Inn when the battalion was out of the line in Bertinoro in February 1945. The pub was to be known as the White Horse Inn [again, a reference to the regimental nickname] and suitably decorated with murals. The battalion Welfare Committee was told to put that into operation, along with an Information and Reading-Writing Room. A week later the White Horse Inn was officially opened. The walls had appropriate murals, and red and white wine and a concoction known as ‘White Horse Special’ was on sale. All this met with the approbation of the men. An Italian band, comprising six instrumentalists, was engaged to appear at the Inn for the duration. In addition, the Queen’s Own Parlour was opened for the use of all

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, War Diary for October 1944

<sup>145</sup> NA WO 170/1416 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King’s Shropshire Light Infantry War Diary for December 1944

<sup>146</sup> NA WO 170/1427 2/5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Leicestershire Regiment War Diary for July 1944

ranks. Amenities there included a Reading and Writing Room-cum-Information room, with a snack bar where tea and sandwiches were sold.<sup>147</sup>

## XII

At an individual level men did what they could to sustain their own morale and that of their comrades. Sing-songs were popular. At Anzio not a night passed in the rest area without a dozen or so little parties “regaling the encircling ammunition dump with their singing and laughter.”<sup>148</sup> The Irish battalions used to spend evenings singing songs of “a national character”.

The attractions of an evening like this grew so much that we decided to publish a book called “Songs of the Irish Brigade”, so that we could all join in when we felt inclined. We collected material from various sources, and though still incomplete, had the book printed at Campobasso. This song book has been an invaluable asset during many an evening in many odd places and is much sought after by people outside the Brigade.<sup>149</sup>

The ordinary soldier’s ability to make his surroundings and day-to-day activities more comfortable showed considerable invention, particularly at Anzio. During January and February the underlying wetness of the ground made it difficult to dig too deep, but as the ground dried out the men were able to dig deeper – and bigger. “Dug-outs became more ingenious and elaborate, constructed out of doors from ruined farms, piles of broken ammunition boxes and even, in some cases, from the huge wine vats left in the cellars of Anzio and Nettuno.”<sup>150</sup>

Parked vehicles left unattended lost alternators, dynamos, batteries and seats, looted in the greater cause of making dugouts a home-from-home. Petrol cans became stoves and brass artillery shell cases chimneys. Everything had a use. Gunners did a brisk trade in the heavy cardboard wrappings for shells, which made excellent insulation for dugout walls. Italian holiday villas along the

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<sup>147</sup> NA WO 170/5022 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for February 1945

<sup>148</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 210

<sup>149</sup> NA WO 204/10425 “The Irish Brigade in Italy”, p. 6

<sup>150</sup> Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio*, p. 209

seafront were raided for furnishings, drapes, crockery and cutlery; after all any fool can be uncomfortable.<sup>151</sup>

In one 'B' Echelon rest area the troops excavated roomy sleeping holes, each containing real beds. Most of the holes were given names such as 'Seaview Hotel', 'The Nook', 'Sunny Side Up' and 'Hawkers and Shells Not Welcome'.<sup>152</sup> Even at the Fortress attempts were made to render dug-outs as homely as possible:

Squash and Sergeant Chesterton have been busy reorganising the décor of the foxhole, and have made shelves out of Yankee ration boxes. Polished mess-tins and some chipped china cups hang in rows on bent nails, and the sergeant has made paraffin lamps out of cigarette tins with pieces of four-by-two as wicks.<sup>153</sup>

It was not just comfort and safety that the soldiers were seeking, although they were paramount. They also wanted to create a sense of civilized order in a disordered world, a space where they could enjoy the illusion of privacy in the overcrowded beachhead. The very lack of a rear area made those intangibles all the more important. "It is extraordinary how the most primitive slit trench shelter can seem like home sometimes!" the Grenadier Guard battalion diarist wrote.<sup>154</sup>

The value of good slit trenches was noted in the December War Diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn KOYLI, when it reported five lessons learnt from fighting in Italy:

3. Value of digging in was brought to the notice of all ranks. In an area heavily shelled, both D and B Coys who dug in quickly and deeply suffered no casualties, although bombarded day after day. When rain and snow fell and slit trenches were filled with water, certain sections were allowed to go into houses. The only casualties that the Bn suffered from hostile shell fire were incurred whilst men were sheltering in houses as opposed to slit trenches.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Morris, *Circles of Hell*, p. 301

<sup>152</sup> Trevelyan, *Rome '44*, p. 237

<sup>153</sup> Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, p. 40

<sup>154</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for February 1944

<sup>155</sup> NA WO 169/10244 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry War Diary for December 1943

Despite the seemingly greater safety of a trench, it is doubtful whether many soldiers would have preferred to stay in a cold, water-filled trench if some kind of warm, waterproofed shelter was available. The Germans knew how important shelters for the troops were in winter: "If troops are unable to find shelters they will not defend their positions well .... they always think that conditions in the rear are bound to be better. This frame of mind is always disastrous."<sup>156</sup> The British soldiers were in bivouacs in the winter of 1944.<sup>157</sup> "Everything possible was done to improve conditions. Such houses as still existed (during the winter of 1944) were patched up as much as possible; Nissen huts and shelters were put up in the most difficult places."<sup>158</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Division ADMS reported in November 1944 that: "Troops have built themselves dwellings out of tent bivouacs surrounded by stone walls. Mud has been used for cement. Floors have been lined with logs and bracken. Shacks have been constructed for cookhouses."<sup>159</sup>

The ability of these soldiers to improvise anything out of anything was staggering. For example, when the official petrol burning cooker was not available, they simply punched a few holes in a jerrican, warmed the petrol inside until it started to vaporise, and then put a match to it. Out shot a long flame at ground level. They bridged the flame with improvised grills on which rested improvised pots and kettles and mugs to produce hot food and beverages. Wherever there was necessity there was plenty of invention.

Each man acquired a private stock of little things which helped to make life more comfortable. For example, he would make a wire cradle for a mug out of an empty tin so that hot tea did not burn his fingers. He would acquire a pair of pliers because there was always wire to be cut or a tin to be opened.... He would appropriate a discarded German helmet, not as a souvenir, but because with the lining taken out it became a portable wash basin.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Quote from Lt.-Gen. Frido von Senger und Etterlin in Bowlby, *Countdown to Cassino*, p. 47

<sup>157</sup> IWM 98/3/1 J.W. Thraves, p. 15

<sup>158</sup> Ray, *Algiers to Austria*, p. 179

<sup>159</sup> NA WO 177/375 Medical Diary – ADMS 1<sup>st</sup> Division November 1944 Appendix A "Med" 1 Div letter M. 150, 18 November 1944

<sup>160</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 93

Feeling clean and tidy was a great morale-booster, especially for troops who had been in the line for some time. As soon as units came out of the line the men would wash, shave, put on clean clothes and visit the barber, if necessary. In Isernia, in November 1943, barbers, tailors and cobblers were set up under the auspices of the Inniskillings.

... a full length wardrobe mirror was erected on the pavement outside Battalion HQ, right at the end of the sentry's beat. Above the mirror was painted the question 'Do you look like a victorious British soldier now?' ..... it did make us polish up after the weeks we had spent in the mud.<sup>161</sup>

The battalion mirror took up permanent residence at battalion HQ, and survived the journey up Italy. In February 1945 it attracted "much attention from the residents" of the town in which the Inniskillings were resting.<sup>162</sup> But it had a beneficial effect not only on the Inniskillings but on other battalions. "General cleanliness, and smartness of the Irish Regt, attracted much attention, at first laughs, but after a day whole-hearted attempts by other units to follow the same example were noticed."<sup>163</sup>

### XIII

What the men hungered for, above all, was news. At the beginning of the Italian campaign, shortage of paper meant that very little could be done with regard to battalion news sheets. Even Montgomery was forced to write letters on Fascist headed notepaper.<sup>164</sup> But as the campaign progressed, and paper and especially printing presses became more readily available, every opportunity was taken in divisional, brigade and battalion newspapers to keep the soldiers up to date with news of the war in general, and on matters of specific battalion interest. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Wiltshires, in its Notes on Recent Operations issued at the end of Anzio, reported that "the issue of a daily Bn newsheet for each Pl and det paid

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<sup>161</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, pp.120-121

<sup>162</sup> NA WO170/5018 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for February 1945

<sup>163</sup> Ibid

<sup>164</sup> Brooks (ed.), *Montgomery*, p. 281

hands down in addition to normal Div and Bde Intelligence Summaries and Newsheets. In battle ... soldiers are constantly thirsting for news.”<sup>165</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Northamptonshires started a Bn News Board outside Bn HQ in March 1944 onto which were pinned any items of interest in the news, with the progress of Soviet Forces in Russia shown daily.<sup>166</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inniskillings published the first issue of *The Shamrock* on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1944, containing “topical and humorous items by members of the Bn.”<sup>167</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Division magazine sheet, *Divisional Diversion*, solicited contributions to the magazine giving “divisional news, humorous stories, interesting points, tales of valour, opinions on general affairs, etc.”<sup>168</sup> *The King’s Shropshire Light Infantry News* of May 1944 reported:

The first real indication we have had that we are “winning the war” was when the M.T.O. and M.T. Sjt were seen returning from a doubtful expedition some considerable distance North of the FACTORY. No questions were asked – but the paniers of the ‘bikes’ were suspiciously full.<sup>169</sup>

Battalion newspapers provided a useful outlet for grievances and gripes, and keeping in touch with battalion members who were in hospital or had been posted elsewhere. During the static warfare conditions so common in Italy, men often experienced relatively long periods of time without action, when boredom, so deadly to morale, could set in. Writing contributions to battalion newspapers gave some men something to do during these periods of inactivity. The 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs produced a particularly lavish monthly newspaper, *The Dragonette*, from January 1944. It ran to over 30 pages and contained information on each company in the battalion; a Locations Column about where various members of the battalion were currently to be found; Letters to the Editor; a Personal Column; poems and

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<sup>165</sup> NA WO 170/1489 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Wiltshire Regiment War Diary for June 1944

<sup>166</sup> NA WO 170/1445 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Northamptonshire Regiment War Diary for March, 1944

<sup>167</sup> NA WO 170/1403 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for April 1944

<sup>168</sup> NA WO 170/1416 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King’s Shropshire Light Infantry War Diary for April 1944 Routine Orders 14 April 1944

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, War Diary for May 1944



features of topical interest; cartoons and competitions.<sup>170</sup> The same mixture of subjects, news from all fronts, humorous stories, jokes and cartoons, appeared in the Coldstream Guards' battalion newspapers, *The Medjez Mail*.<sup>171</sup> *The Invicta News* (6<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal West Kents) reproduced the BBC news and carried items of general interest. One such item was "Statistics of Jane" (the popular *Daily Mirror* cartoon strip). In a period of ten months during which Jane was featured in two stories, as a British Agent in an Aircraft Factory and the Ersatz Queen, she was apparently partially or completely "exposed" 208 times.<sup>172</sup> Battalion newspapers became particularly important to morale after D-Day, when the focus of attention back in the UK switched from Italy to Normandy. If the British press was going to turn its back on Italy, the only thing to do was provide your own news, and there was a rash of new battalion newspapers: the first edition of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hamps' *Tiger Rag* went to press in October 1944, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> King's produced the first edition of *The Scouser's Spasmodical* in November 1944.<sup>173</sup>

#### XIV

Officers, NCO and individual soldiers all made their contributions to corporate morale. In general their actions were positive but, in some unfortunate cases, 'own goals' proved very disheartening to the players. From the evidence available it would appear that, certainly up until the winter of 1944/45, the majority of officers were good, hard-working leaders who tried to provide for their men's physical and mental wellbeing and comfort to the best of their abilities, both in and out of the line. War-weariness, however, eventually caught up

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<sup>170</sup> NA WO 1709/1368 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diaries for April – June, 1944

<sup>171</sup> NA WO 170/1347 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for June 1944

<sup>172</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for March 1944 *Invicta News* 30 March

<sup>173</sup> NA WO 170/1399 2/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for October 1944; NA WO 170/1418 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The King's Regiment War Diary for November 1944



"Pain in your abdomen be 'blowed! Not you've  
got is a pain in your stummick. Only officers  
'as abdomens!"

(Drawing by Pte. Edwards, I Sec)

-24-

Hullo Joe, wa'd 'ya know ?

Give yourself 10 points for every one of the following questions you answer correctly. A score of 60 is average, 80 is pretty good, 100 is exceptional and if you score 120 what the heck are you doing in the Infantry ?

Answers on Page - 48.

1. A wind becomes a gale when it
  - (i) blows the mess tent down,
  - (ii) blows at 40 m.p.h. or more,
  - (iii) blows at over 60 m.p.h.
2. The English Regiment known as the "Moonrakers" is the
  - (i) Wiltshires,
  - (ii) West Kents,
  - (iii) Artists Rifles.
3. The oldest Military body in England is
  - (i) General Sir Alan Brooke,
  - (ii) The Chelsea Pensioners,
  - (iii) The Yeomen of the Guard.
4. The proportion of an iceberg seen above water is
  - (i) One third,
  - (ii) One ninth,
  - (iii) One quarter.
5. A German U-boat is so called from the first letter of its name, which is
  - (i) Unterwassercraften,
  - (ii) Unterschblitzen,
  - (iii) Unterseeboot.

6. What device was carried by the Saxons as their standard ?  
Was it
- (i) A white horse,
  - (ii) A black boar,
  - (iii) A red lion.
7. The American equivalent to the V.C. is
- (i) The Purple Heart,
  - (ii) United States Star,
  - (iii) Congressional Medal of Honour.
8. The Palace of the Doges is in
- (i) Texas,
  - (ii) Italy,
  - (iii) Iraq.
9. While flying at 25,000ft. on a clear day, you can see
- (i) 50 miles,
  - (ii) 100 miles,
  - (iii) 200 miles.
10. "Now that the political ignorance of every-woman has been enfranchised and added to the political ignorance and folly of everyman, Government is by Anybody, chosen by Everybody" - was written by
- (i) George Bernard Shaw,
  - (ii) H.G. Wells,
  - (iii) Beachcomber.
11. The lithosphere is
- (i) part of the Orderly Room's copying machine,
  - (ii) the outer crust of the earth,
  - (iii) the space above the stratosphere.
12. A geophone is a device for
- (i) locating sounds which come through the ground,
  - (ii) imitating horses on the radio,
  - (iii) measuring "oomph".

1. 40 m.p.h. or more.
2. The Wiltshires.
3. The Yeomen of the Guard.
4. One ninth.
5. Unterseeboot.
6. A White horse.
7. Congressional Medal of Honour.
8. Italy (Venice).
9. 200 miles.
10. George Bernard Shaw.
11. The outer crust of the earth (ten miles thick).
12. Locating sounds which come through the ground.

ooo000ooo

It seems that our London coppers are getting used to Allied soldiers airing their knowledge, now that Basic English has come to stay, because a Czech approached one the other day and said

"Which watch" ?

The policeman knew he was after the time, so he showed him his wrist-watch.

"H'm" - said the man, "six watch - such much" !!

ooo000ooo

#### TAILPIECE.

We have it on good authority that the latest way of catching polar bears is to dig a hole in the ice, put a circle of peas all round the edge of the hole. Then when the bear comes for a pea, kick him in the icehole . S'fact.

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with officers as well as the men. One officer recalled the general wearing away of the spirit:

I felt in September 1943 that if I was given a job I just went and did it. But by the end I was beginning to feel, instead of saying 'come on chaps, follow me', I was starting to say 'I'll put my headquarters here and you go there', which many people had done from the beginning, but that was not my way.<sup>174</sup>

This had a knock-on effect on the men under their command, and might have been a contributory factor to the rising absentee toll.

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<sup>174</sup> IWM Sound Archives 13878 R. Collins, Reel 11

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **THE WAR OFFICE, THE ARMY AUTHORITIES IN ITALY AND MORALE**

Senior commanders, both at the War Office and at GHQ, Allied Armies in Italy, implemented a whole raft of measures during the course of World War II to try to alleviate concerns which might adversely influence their soldiers' morale. A soldier who had home worries, or whose living conditions out of the line were unsatisfactory, would not be an efficient soldier. The rising desertion rate in Italy in 1944 forced commanders to take a keen interest in addressing any and all such problems. They needed to conserve their manpower and prevent soldiers worrying about external influences which took their minds off the execution of their duties. The measures they put in place covered the whole spectrum of a soldier's life, from his domestic considerations, his living conditions, his education and his future once the war was over. The major concerns were home leave, domestic worries, mail, cigarettes and food, clothing, rest out of the line and entertainment. Each area will be examined to ascertain how successful the Army was in dealing with these problems affecting soldiers' morale.

#### **I**

The Army Council began to organize this effort in 1942, when they instituted a Morale Committee. Commanders in Italy, recognizing that morale was slipping, especially after the winter of 1943/4 and the long drawn-out battles for Cassino and Anzio, established their own AFHQ Morale committee in June 1944.<sup>1</sup> Its terms of reference were:

- (a) To study morale in its broadest aspect, including future problems when hostilities have ceased
- (b) To co-ordinate and prepare quarterly morale reports to the War Office.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee was made up of Sir Brian Robertson, the Chief Administrative Officer, Allied Armies in Italy; the Deputy Adjutant General; the Deputy Quarter Master General; the ADAG (P); and the Director of Welfare. The Italian Morale Committee reports dealt with disciplinary matters such as desertion to a far greater extent than the War Office Reports, but other than that their principal area of concern mirrored, to a large extent, those of the War Office: the general welfare of the men.

Welfare was an area in which the Army Council placed great emphasis, indeed, “on a scale never previously contemplated in war or peace.”<sup>3</sup> Following the adverse comments in North Africa about the inadequacy of amenities provided for British servicemen in contrast to the Americans, an office new to operational command was created in November 1943 when the Directorate of Welfare was set up at AFHQ under Brigadier A.L.W. Newth, the Director General.<sup>4</sup> The object of Army Welfare, according to the Army Director General of Welfare and Education, Major-General Harry Willans:

May be stated as being the maintenance of the morale of officers and men; primarily to make them fit to carry out their duty as soldiers when the time comes ... with the utmost possible efficiency ... In order to achieve this object, it is necessary to cater for the whole needs of the man – the needs of his mind,

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<sup>1</sup> See NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, June 1944

<sup>2</sup> NA WO 204/6701 Directive – Morale Committee, 8 June 1944

<sup>3</sup> NA CAB 106/454 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 18, NAAFI/EFI, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 17



his body and his spirit ... which together will result in a contented soldier and so a contented Army.<sup>5</sup>

Welfare personnel were not included in the phased programme of built-up after the Italian invasion, because of shortage of shipping. After the capture of Naples in October 1943 a small advance party was sent to the city to lay the groundwork for future expansion, but while the fighting remained fluid and the advance continued not much attention was paid to the welfare services. However, once the line became static in December, and no doubt spurred on by a rise in the desertion figures, real effort was put into improving the general welfare of the men. In January 1944 a section of the Welfare Directorate, under the Deputy Director Welfare, was attached to AFHQ Adv. Admin. Echelon to deal directly with the welfare branches then operating in Italy. These were the AKS (Army Kinema Service), ENSA (Entertainment National Service Association), CVWW (the Council of Voluntary War Work), SSAFA (Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Family Association), Broadcasting Service, BAN (The British Army Newspaper Unit) and the normal services concerned with the supply of welfare stores.

The staff at AFHQ, from both the Welfare Directorate and the Adjutant General's branch, were involved in a step-by-step improvement in the amenities available to soldiers in Italy. It was an ongoing battle, very much at the forefront of attempts to maintain morale. In September 1944, Robertson wrote that "as it now seems very probable that we shall be faced with the continuation of the war into 1945, and an offensive in this theatre in the

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<sup>5</sup> NA WO 277/4 Army Welfare, p. 28

Spring of that year, my C-in-C is most anxious that everything possible shall be done to sustain and build up the morale of the troops during winter.”<sup>6</sup>

## II

Operational imperatives often ran counter to the soldiers’ needs. The principal factor degrading morale in Italy was war weariness: too many soldiers had been involved for too long in a war far away from home. Home leave remained a sore point to the troops in Italy, especially towards the end of the campaign. MPs reported after their visit to Italy at the beginning of 1945 that some troops believed that leave was available after shorter service in some units than in others. “Frequently we were told that men in some units had gone on leave after eighteen months, while in the complainant’s unit it was running at three years plus.”<sup>7</sup> Equally, opinion within Eighth Army, from top to bottom, was that the period of overseas service for the army should be shortened.<sup>8</sup> They also felt they were being treated unfairly compared to troops in Western Europe, who had been granted home leave after just six months, and the far shorter length of overseas service for airmen. In August 1944, a AFHQ Morale Report stated that from every source came confirmation that long service overseas caused the breakdown of family life.

Men feel widely that the Government in general, and the Secretary of State for War in particular, have no interest in the matter and this is alleged to be evidenced by the different treatment given to the RN and RAF. Explanations have failed to change the outlook which has varied from “gloomy resignation to bitter resentment.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> NA 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings and Reports, December 1943-March 1945. Report of 29 September, 1944, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> NA WO 106/3975 Extract from Report by Members of Parliament on their Visit to Italy, January 1945

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter Ending 31 August 1944, Section 1: Morale, p. 8 Home Affairs, Post War and Demobilisation

The belief that the powers-that-be had no interest in soldiers' family worries did nothing to build up morale. Lt. Colonel Batten, Secretary of the Overseas Department of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Family Association, told a SSAFA Annual meeting:

For various reasons, owing to long separation, changes of address and location, unkind letters, etc., a large number of men, at some time or another, have worries about their families at home. These worries, if not removed, unquestionably affect the man's morale very seriously as a fighting soldier and make him either inefficient or discontented.<sup>10</sup>

"Goodness knows how much we think of you people at home. The further away the more you mean to us," wrote army chaplain Bill Cook to his fiancée at home.<sup>11</sup> A British officer reported to the Army Morale Committee that: "the two main factors affecting morale of the soldier overseas are the mail and the female."<sup>12</sup> The "unkind letters" referred to by Lt.-Col Batten usually related to a wife's supposed infidelity. An Army chaplain wrote to his fiancée about one such letter to a soldier: "There was a letter to say that his Missis had been getting fed up and bored, and is playing about with another man. Goodness, this separation is making such a mess."<sup>13</sup> There were also the "Dear John" letters. The accepted wisdom at the War Office was that infidelity generally occurred either within three months of separation or shortly after three years. A Morale Report noted that:

Family conditions inevitably tend to deteriorate in direct ratio with the length of service abroad, and many distressing cases of infidelity on the part of wives point to the gravity of the problem. Chaplains are impressed by the number of men who are prepared to forgive their wives when misconduct has become obvious and advocate every assistance bring given to these men to get home and straighten the tangles caused by long service abroad. This serious state of affairs, which strikes at the very root of national life, is completely disastrous to good soldiering.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Family Association (hereinafter SSAFA) 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, 2 July 1943

<sup>11</sup> Cook, H & Cook, B. *Khaki Parish* (Worthing, Sussex; Churchman Publishing, 1988) p. 77

<sup>12</sup> NA WO 163/162 Report to the Morale Committee, August-October 1943, B – Overseas Forces, Item 13 (b)

<sup>13</sup> Cook, *Khaki Parish*, p. 184

<sup>14</sup> NA WO 204/6701 Morale Report, 4 September 1944, p. 1

The War Office accepted the reality of the situation. "It is obvious that the protracted separation of husbands and wives is going to lead to many cases of illicit co-habitation. Provided that the necessary precautions are taken, I think that this must be accepted ..."<sup>15</sup>

Men at the receiving end of such a reality were not so pragmatic. One soldier recalled how he had to break the news to a friend that the latter's wife back home in England was expecting another man's child.

I'm sure if he could have got home on leave a year earlier, he would have been able to sort out any problems. This was the trouble with a unit such as ours ... our battle experience in what was now our fourth theatre of war meant that we were picked for any operation that was going. For instance, after the war finished in Africa, we saw soldiers sent home on leave from units who had been a short time abroad; including France, we have been overseas for nearly 3 years and things do go wrong at home with wives and sweethearts, and there is nothing that one can do about it, except that hope that someone such as SSAFA can make a home visit and sort something out. One could not blame completely those left at home ... the loneliness must have been awful and temptations very strong.<sup>16</sup>

A report to the AFHQ Deputy Adjutant General, AAI, at the end of 1944 refuted "the widely held theory that infidelity occurs after 3 years' absence." Based on the analysis of the number of requests for compassionate posting considered by the AFHQ Committee between June 1<sup>st</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup> 1944, the report concluded that "the peak figure is between one and two years. It falls slightly between two and three years and very rapidly after three years."<sup>17</sup> Given the length of service of many of the soldiers in Italy, the possibility of morale problems brought about by home difficulties was a real danger, one of which the War Office was well aware. It did what it could, via the pages of newspapers

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<sup>15</sup> NA WO 163/161 Morale Report May-July 1943, B – Overseas Forces, Item 10(b), MEF

<sup>16</sup> IWM 98/3/1 J.W. Thraves, pp.13-14

<sup>17</sup> NA WO 170/5 G1 (Br) AFHQ War Diary, December 1944 Minutes of DAG's Fortnightly Conference (No. 22) held at AFHQ 5 December 1944. Appendix 'B'. Report of ADAG(P), Item 17 Compassionate Posting

and magazines, to encourage women in the UK not to write “Dear John” letters, but, due to the manpower crisis, it was unable to tackle the root of the problem, lack of adequate home leave.

### III

Since home leave was not possible given the manpower crisis, a good mail service was paramount. The Adjutant General, Sir Ronald Adam, “always put the mails first as a morale factor.”<sup>18</sup> Letters reminded men what they were fighting for. “If you ask them what they are out there for, they say they are fighting for their homes,” Lt.-Col. J.F. Batten told the SSAFA Branch Conference in 1943.<sup>19</sup> The majority of British soldiers had no deep ideological motivation, they were just doing a job and were looking forward to going home. Over and above their vital role in conveying news from families and friends, letters had their own intrinsic value in maintaining a soldier’s morale: the very act of writing and receiving letters provided a link with “home” and all the unarticulated sentiment the word implies. Individual soldiers might be adversely affected by bad news from home, but whole fighting units were demoralised if the mail was delayed. Bad news was never welcome, but even bad news was better than no news at all. Soldiers abroad could easily become cut off from “normal” life, and letters were one of the few means open to them to remain grounded in their civilian lives. The act of letter writing itself allowed every soldier the means of mentally retreating from any uncongenial situation in which he found himself, to overcome the sense of isolation, loneliness and fear experienced by front-line troops between engagements. Letters and photographs were carried next to the heart, traces of personal actuality.<sup>20</sup> One soldier wrote: “The one thing that keeps chaps going, that gives

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<sup>18</sup> SSAFA 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, 2 July 1943

<sup>19</sup> SSAFA 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, 3 July 1943, Report of the Council & Accounts, 1942, Item 5

<sup>20</sup> R. Blythe (ed.), *Private Words* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 217

them a sort of dogged persistence in living through these interim days, is the thought of Home.”<sup>21</sup> An infantry officer referred to the necessities of life in the front line as “food, water and ammunition – and mail and rum.”<sup>22</sup> The content of most letters was forlorn. There was hardly any talk of “death and glory”, or even fear. Most were concerned with mundane domestic matters and the discomfort of their present conditions.<sup>23</sup>

The Army Director General of Welfare and Education, Major-General Harry Willans, was one of the first senior officers at the War Office to appreciate the importance of regular and speedy mail delivery overseas.<sup>24</sup> A representative of the Welfare Directorate sat on all Morale Committee Meetings from their inauguration in 1942, and on the Troops Mail Policy and Planning Committee, established in 1943. Field Marshal Montgomery was of like mind:

Letters from home play a great part in morale .... There must be no unnecessary delays, either in the soldier receiving his letters, or in the letters he writes getting home. A good delivery system, prompt censoring, and an accurate record for purposes of re-directing when a man leaves his unit, are all necessary.<sup>25</sup>

The Army tried to ensure, within the constraints under which it was working, that there was a regular flow of letters between the UK and Italy, and as the campaign progressed, the mail service improved considerably. There were various types of letters available to soldiers. Regular letters, carried between the UK and Italy by ship, were restricted only by the availability of paper. Airgraphs were an innovation introduced in 1941 to speed up the

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<sup>21</sup> The Journal of Private R.L. Crimp in Blythe, *Private Words*, p. 192

<sup>22</sup> Horsfall, *Fling Our Banner to the Wind*, p. 24

<sup>23</sup> Joan de Smith (ed.), *Dog Easy: The Love and War Letters of A Cambridge Professor* (Sittingbourne, Kent, SAWS Publication, 1991), p. 107

<sup>24</sup> NA WO 277/4 *Army Welfare*, p. 41

<sup>25</sup> Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery, “Notes on the Conduct of War and the Infantry Division in Battle”, November 1944, quoted in Sparrow, *Morale*, p. 4

mail. Single page letters were reduced on negative film with a special Kodak machine, and then reproduced at their final destination in positive form, smaller than the original (4" x 5 3/8" when reproduced), but large enough to read easily. A film containing negatives of 250 airgraphs weighed only a few ounces and provided a temporary solution to the problem of shortage of aircraft space. Due to the obvious lack of privacy their popularity declined when there was no longer any need to ration the issue of air letters. The air letter was light-weight paper, slightly larger than quarto size, which could be folded into four and sealed on two edges to keep the communication private.<sup>26</sup> They were issued to soldiers on a weekly basis, in steadily increasing numbers, as the campaign progressed. One soldier wrote of the air letter:

Every soldier will carry with him something of the agony and ecstasy brought about by the arrival of those little thin rectangular missives ... Agony if there was nothing for him at all or if there was and it contained news of a love that was lost, of an infidelity, or perhaps of a bereavement. Ecstasy simply because there was a letter for him, and he knew he had not been forgotten.<sup>27</sup>

Most mail was unit-censored and the Army did try to ensure that there were no unnecessary delays in censoring these letters. If it did happen, the officer responsible was reprimanded. The initial censorship was exercised by the platoon commander, who had to read the personal letters of his men, all of which were handed in unsealed. "The fact that this never seemed to cause the slightest mutual embarrassment in quite extraordinary", wrote one such officer.<sup>28</sup>

The officer who regarded it as just another bloody chore would skim through the wording – inevitably as far as he was concerned a boring blend of love-laden and laboriously written banality. If he spotted anything like a place name or anything in the way of a fact or a figure which might conceivably be of help to the enemy he would simply scratch it out....In the same way the soldier saw

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<sup>26</sup> IWM Accession No. 83/3275 R. Gould & E. Proud (eds)., *History of British Army Postal Service, Vol. III, 1927-1963* (Proud, Bailey & Co., n.d.), p. 113

<sup>27</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 97

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

the whole thing so impersonally that he was seldom if ever deterred from pouring out his love, his heart, and masses of kisses. In the many hundreds of letters, perhaps thousands of them, which it was my duty to read, not once did I detect any inhibition displayed by the writers because they knew that I or someone else would be reading them.<sup>29</sup>

There was also a “green” envelope, for letters relating to private and family matters only, which was censored at base. Lt.-Colonel John Sparrow, noted that “while some men feel constrained in writing where their letters are unit-censored, they write quite freely in green envelopes ... Indeed, most writers seem to forget the censor – whether the Base Censor or their officer – when they write.”<sup>30</sup> Privilege Air Mail Letter Cards, which were subject only to Base Censorship in the same manner as the green envelopes, and not at battalion level, became available in Italy in January 1944 and issued at the rate of one a month.<sup>31</sup> In May 1944, all ORs’ air letters became subject to the same censorship regulations as the green envelopes, so the task of reading the men’s letters no longer fell on officers – a relief for both officers and men.<sup>32</sup> For really urgent messages there were telegrams. For 2s.6d a soldier would send up to three phrases out of a prepared list of 81 standardized messages (see next page). The charge included the address and the name of the sender.

Detailed postal planning for Sicily was drawn up prior to HUSKY. There were frequent delays in the transmission of surface mail from the UK to Sicily, routed via Algiers, due to the congestion in that port. At one stage the number of vessels awaiting unloading was such that mails were held up for as long as 18 days.<sup>33</sup> A satisfactory airmail service, however, was soon established and during July and August 1943 the average transit time

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Sparrow, *Morale*, p. 36

<sup>31</sup> NA WO 170/1396 1/4<sup>th</sup> Bn The Hampshire Regiment War Diary for January 1944 Battalion Orders, 3 January

<sup>32</sup> NA WO 170/1382 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Duke of Wellington’s Regiment War Diary for May 1944



**FOR HANDLED TEXT TELEGRAMS. TO AND FROM SOLDIERS AND ALLIED SERVICES  
IN ANY PART OF THE EMPIRE AND THE INDIA AREA.**

Senders may use any of the phrases on this card up to a maximum of three phrases per telegram. The charge for each telegram is 2s.6d whether one, two or three phrases are used. This charge includes the address and the name of the sender.

**OUR RESPONSES.**

1. Letter received many thanks.
2. Letters received many thanks.
3. Telegram received many thanks.
4. Parcel received many thanks.
5. Parcels received many thanks.
6. Letters and parcels received many thanks.
7. Letter and telegram received many thanks.
8. Telegram and parcels received many thanks.
9. Letters sent.
10. Parcels sent.
11. Letters and parcels sent.
12. Many thanks for letter.
13. Many thanks for parcel.
14. Many thanks for telegram.
15. No news of you for some time.
16. Writing.
17. Urgent.
18. Please write or telegraph.
19. Please write.
20. Please telegraph.
21. Please reply worried.
- 22.
- 23.
- 24.
- GENERALITIES. (25.)**
26. Greetings.
27. Loving greetings.
28. Fondest greetings.
29. Love.
30. Darling.
31. All my love.
32. All my love dearest.
33. All our love.
34. Fondest love.
35. Fondest love darling.
36. Best wishes.
37. Greetings from us all.
38. Loving greetings from all of us.
39. Best wishes from all of us.
40. Fondest wishes from all of us.
41. Best wishes and good health.
42. Kisses.
43. Love and kisses.
44. Fondest love and kisses.
45. Well.
46. All well at home.
47. Best wishes for Christmas.
48. Best wishes for Christmas and New Year.
49. Loving wishes for Christmas.
50. Loving wishes for Christmas and New Year.

51. Loving Christmas thoughts.
52. Happy Christmas.
53. Happy Christmas and New Year.
54. Good luck.
55. Keep smiling.
56. My thoughts are with you.
57. Many happy returns.
58. Birthday greetings.
59. Loving birthday greetings.
60. Happy anniversary.
61. You are more than ever in my thoughts at this time.
62. Best wishes for a speedy return.
63. Good show keep it up.
- 64.
- 65.
- 66.
- 67.

**HEALTH.**

68. Family All well.
69. All well children evacuated.
70. All well children returned home.
71. All well and safe.
72. Are you alright.
73. Are you alright worried about you.
74. Please don't worry.
75. Hope you are improving.
76. Please telegraph that you are well.
77. Are you ill.
78. How you been ill.
79. Illness is not serious.
80. Illness is serious.
81. I have left hospital.
82. In bad health.
83. Health improving.
84. Health fully restored.
85. Son born.
86. Daughter born.
- 87.
- 88.
- 89.
- 90.

**PROMOTION.**

91. Congratulations on your promotion.
92. Very pleased to hear of your promotion.
93. Delighted to hear about your promotion.
- 94.
- 95.
- 96.
- 97.

for airmail between the UK and Sicily was six days. The 6<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry got their first mail on July 19<sup>th</sup> and all the way through the Battle of Sferro (July 20<sup>th</sup>-August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943) the mail continued to arrive for the Gordon Highlanders.<sup>34</sup> One 78<sup>th</sup> Division man, however, compared the mail service in the Eighth Army unfavourably with the First: "No air letters or green envelopes in this country," he wrote in his diary on August 28<sup>th</sup>. "We would prefer I Army administration! Mail in seems to be delayed too."<sup>35</sup>

At Salerno, letters were always the best morale-booster. "In general when the mail arrived, an atmosphere of silent abstraction, comparable only with the Church, enveloped the battalion," reported one officer.<sup>36</sup> When the Eighth Army landed in Italy they had no mail for some weeks. Montgomery signalled 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group: "No letters received for long time and adverse comment and grumbling from troops. Nothing has such an adverse effect on morale as lack of mail from home."<sup>37</sup> It usually took about two weeks for airmail letters to arrive from the UK, and surface mail up to six weeks.<sup>38</sup> Postal Units reported disappointing mail arrivals during the whole of September 1943, and no explanation could be found. The 46<sup>th</sup> Division Postal Unit reported on September 25<sup>th</sup> that "Division mails stated to be held at Bizerta, but are being forwarded. No advice yet to hand. There is no reason why mails should not have come to hand, as regular both way service was signalled by Postal Directorate, AFHQ on 21<sup>st</sup> September."<sup>39</sup> The situation became so worrying that in September the GOC, X Corps ordered an officer to fly to Bizerta to investigate the mail

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<sup>33</sup> IWM 83/3275 Gould & Proud, *History of British Army Postal Services Vol III 1927-1963*, p. 218

<sup>34</sup> NA WO 169/10203 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Durham Light Infantry War Diary for July 1943; Pond, *Sicily*, p. 161

<sup>35</sup> IWM 62/89/1 P. Pettit, 28 August 1943

<sup>36</sup> Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 112

<sup>37</sup> NA WO 214/62 Alexander Papers Signal to Alexander, 23 September 1943

<sup>38</sup> NA WO 169/8727 5<sup>th</sup> Division Postal Unit RE War Diary for September 1943

<sup>39</sup> NA WO 169/8776 46<sup>th</sup> Division Postal Unit RE War Diary for September 1943

delay.<sup>40</sup> Even in October 46<sup>th</sup> Division was questioning the long transit time for mail from the UK and headquarters was expressing “extreme dissatisfaction” with the lack of mails and the transit times.<sup>41</sup> The situation was, however, gradually improving in both armies and in a morale-boosting exercise Montgomery made it known throughout the Eighth Army in October that he had “asked Mr. Churchill that a direct air-mail service be flown from England to Foggia” now that the airfield was in Allied hands.<sup>42</sup>

There were few complaints about mail at Cassino. In fact, a good mail service was regarded as so important that one battalion placed its priority in the supplies going up to forward companies ahead of ammunition, just behind medical requirements and food.<sup>43</sup> Soldiers who were pinned down by day could still read and write letters.<sup>44</sup> “Throughout the battle, the rations and mail had always come up ...” remembered one officer.<sup>45</sup> For those in the mountains around Cassino, supplies were divided as widely as possible among the mules in case of loss, and the mail was carried in waterproof containers.<sup>46</sup> When two battalions of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade suffered heavy casualties and were withdrawn to an area east of Monte Trocchio for rest and re-equipment, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Postal Unit formed a mobile Field Post Office to serve these units immediately they came out of the line, and made sure airgraphs were available.<sup>47</sup> By this time the allotment of air letters was six a month. In March 1944 it was possible to send photographs home in personal mail “provided that, if the photograph has been taken by a civilian photographer, the address of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, War Diary for October 1943

<sup>42</sup> NA WO 169/10251 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers War Diary for October 1943

<sup>43</sup> NA WO 170/1404 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for January 1944

<sup>44</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, p. 132

<sup>45</sup> Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, p. 70

<sup>46</sup> Ray, *From Algiers to Austria*, p. 119

<sup>47</sup> NA WO 170/425 4<sup>th</sup> Division Postal Unit RE War Diary for April 1944

the photographer does not appear on the print.”<sup>48</sup> The mail service was good at Anzio as well, with a special LSI sailing from Nisida carrying letters to the beachhead. The only hiccup was when 56 bags were lost by shipwreck.<sup>49</sup> Generally, by the summer of 1944, most soldiers were very pleased with the mail service. There were, however, calls for the cost of air letters outward from the UK to be reduced from 6d to 3d. The War Office refused to consider this demand on the grounds that it would call for addition air lift which was not available.<sup>50</sup> There was also widespread criticism at the imposition of purchase tax on gifts sent to the UK, but by the end of 1944 the increase of the value of concession labels from £8 to £12 per annum, and the arrangements which allowed such packages to be sent by registered post at the letter rate did much to reduce the complaints.<sup>51</sup> By the end of the campaign the Army was able to introduce free air mail to the UK for troops and a great expansion of the air mail service from the UK. These moves were enthusiastically received and a number of commanders pointed out “that the good effect of this concession is far in excess of its monetary value.”<sup>52</sup>

Soldiers wanted to read about domestic minutiae that had made up the day-to-day living they remembered from before the war, allowing them to hold together their fragmented lives. Right from the start of the war there was a flood of advice to women on how to write to their soldier husbands or boyfriends. *Woman's Own*, for instance, advised its readers to:

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<sup>48</sup> NA WO 170/1404 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for March 1944

<sup>49</sup> NA WO 170/397 1<sup>st</sup> Division Postal Unit RE War Diary for February 1944

<sup>50</sup> NA WO32/15772 War Office Morale Committee Report, Part I, The Army Overseas, June-August 1944, p. 6

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, Part I, The Army Overseas, December 1944-February 1945, p. 6

Try to get into your letter something of your own personality so that when he reads it he can say to himself: "I can just imagine her doing that, saying that...."

Remind him of amusing episodes you have shared, chaff him a little about that snap he sent you.

And remember he is never tired of reading in actual words that you love him, that you want him home again and that nothing has changed through his having answered the call of his country.<sup>53</sup>

Writing worrying letters to a soldier overseas was frowned upon: women's magazines' Agony Aunts always maintained that since the soldier was facing danger, privation, loneliness, possible pain and death for the sake of his family, no one should add to his hardships by sending him bad news.<sup>54</sup> Whatever advice they were given about the contents of their letters, the fact was that women wrote fewer letters than their menfolk. Perhaps they were busier in their daily routine. The discrepancy in the number of letters to and from home caused considerable concern to the War Office Morale Committee, particularly during the latter half of the war. A representative of the Welfare Directorate, for instance, told the Troops Mail Policy and Planning Committee in December 1943, that he was hoping to arrange publicity urging wives to write to their menfolk overseas more often.<sup>55</sup> This seems to have been a perennial problem. Eighteen months later the Adjutant General was invited to take up the question of a circular letter to the Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds "urging women whose menfolk were serving in overseas theatres to write to them more frequently."<sup>56</sup> At least one battalion instituted a pen-pal service for its men:

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, Part I, The Army Overseas, March-May 1945, p. 16

<sup>53</sup> "I Sent A Letter To My Love," *Woman's Own*, 27 July 1940, p. 5

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, "Mrs. Marryat Advises", *Woman's Weekly*, 24 July 1943, p. 113

<sup>55</sup> NA WO 163/217 Troops Mail Policy and Planning Committee. Ninth Meeting, 17 December 1943

<sup>56</sup> NA WO 163/166 Minutes of the Thirty-Eighth Meeting of the Morale Committee, 28 May 1945

Our battalion took notice of the people who hadn't any letters come regular, and they sent their names and addresses back to Britain to the YMCA for people to write to them. Gave him a pen pal. I know of one man – three times we came out of the line, he never had a letter from home, and I says to him 'you not married?' and he says 'no' . 'No girlfriend?' "No". And I sent his name back and it was months and months after, he got a letter and he came to me and he says "I've had a letter from a girl. She wants to be a pen pal. Did you send me? I said I was told to send you. He says, "Thanks, I've got someone to write to now' ..... I really felt sorry for the ones who didn't get letters.<sup>57</sup>

#### IV

Troops needed recognition from the wider community as well. "If the nation validates the sacrifices which the soldier is making, then the soldier is given the sense that the cause in which he is fighting is right."<sup>58</sup> His belief in the importance of that what he was doing, and thus his morale, was reinforced. Recognition from a grateful nation was not often forthcoming in Italy. During the defensive periods of March and April 1944, despite the constant patrolling and the continuous drain on manpower through enemy action, most papers reported that there was "little action".<sup>59</sup> Then Cassino became headline news. Philip Ure, *The Times*' special correspondent, wrote on May 18<sup>th</sup>: "British troops looked down on us from the lesser height of Castle Hill and waved cheerfully. They are irrepressibly cheerful, these men who have endured so much with stolid, simple courage."<sup>60</sup> The troops were finally getting the recognition they knew was their due, but sometimes not quickly enough. General Leese was concerned at the end of May that the censorship authorities were not releasing the names of units which had done particularly well in action. "It does a great deal to boost morale both out here and I submit also at home if the exploits of units can be recorded in the Press as soon as possible after they occur. If one waits a

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<sup>57</sup> IWM Sound Archives 17622 W. Cowans, Reel 11

<sup>58</sup> H. Strachan, "Some Historiographical Comparisons" in P. Addison & A. Calder (Eds.), *Time To Kill*, p. 376

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, *Combat Nurse*, p. 177

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Strawson, *The Italian Campaign*, p. 163

week or a fortnight the glamour of a particular action dwindles as it becomes less important in the Press owing to more recent developments.”<sup>61</sup>

More recent developments included the Normandy Landings. June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944 marked a profound watershed for the troops in Italy. The emphasis of the war, and interest at home, shifted from Italy to Normandy. Soldiers started to feel that people at home had lost interest in, and were neglecting, the troops in Italy; that the troops in North West Europe were better regarded and given preferential treatment when they were on leave in the UK; and that Italy was considered a sideshow, without danger, hardship or importance.<sup>62</sup> “It was, therefore, particularly galling to men who had served away from home for so long and had engaged in two or three D-Days on their own before Normandy, to find themselves branded D-Day Dodgers by MP Lady Astor.”<sup>63</sup> “There was almost a tendency in some quarters to disparage the lads from Italy as men lurking in luxury among the vineyards and signorinas (such was the impression certain popular illustrated magazines created) whilst real soldiers were slogging away in the mud of the Ardennes.”<sup>64</sup> Many of the soldiers had been fighting for several years, unlike many of the men of 21 Army Group, who had only been in the line since June. “The Fifth Army has almost dropped out of the radio news” noted one battalion diarist in November.<sup>65</sup> “There were some desertions, the troops felt they were forgotten, they had been abroad a long time, there didn’t seem much point in bashing on.”<sup>66</sup> This feeling that the Italian theatre was now of minor importance was noted

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<sup>61</sup> NA WO 216/168 Leese Papers Letter to Major-General Kennedy at the War Office, 26 May 1944

<sup>62</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945, p. 1

<sup>63</sup> One version of the story is that Lady Astor received a letter from soldiers in Italy signed ‘D-Day Dodgers’. She assumed this to be a unit nickname and repeated it either in a speech or in a letter. See Doherty, *A Noble Crusade*, p. 276

<sup>64</sup> Renshaw, *Memoirs of An Army Surgeon*, p. 306

<sup>65</sup> NA WO 170/1348 3rd Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for November 1944

<sup>66</sup> IWM 91/16/1 Captain H.M. Jones Italy and Austria July 1944-November 1945, p. 10 September 1944

with some dismay by army commanders. "If this is not checked there will be a decrease of effort and enthusiasm. A message, emphasising the importance of the Italian Theatre in the whole plan to knock out Germany would do good."<sup>67</sup> Luckily, from the point of view of morale, the soubriquet "D-Day Dodgers" was adopted almost as a badge of pride by Eighth Army, and various versions of the D-Day Dodgers song was sung to the melody of Lili Marlene. "Jon" (Welshman W.J. Jones, whose Two Type drawings appeared in *8<sup>th</sup> Army News*, *Union Jack* and *Crusader*) produced cartoons which mocked such attitudes, but some resentment remained and the dissociation of the front line men from the home front was not helped by such misguided comments.

The soldiers, in turn, were particularly scathing about men who had remained back in the UK. One soldier wrote in his diary: "I was at Ortona, fought hard for Castelfrantano, Orsogna ... those tough towns that won't fall, is it worth the lives lost daily and back home they just talk about coal strikes."<sup>68</sup> Another wrote: "The news of those of us who bore the main burden of the war when dockers, miners or industrial workers went slow or struck for improvements in pay and conditions were more bitter than those in reserved occupations were aware of."<sup>69</sup> Yet another soldier in Italy was even more scathing:

I suppose in England it seems nearly over now. Out here it seems interminable. I was thoroughly disgusted to read in *8<sup>th</sup> Army News* (our own excellent army paper) that seats for the Victory parade were being sold for 20 guineas. The racketeering little swine who thinks we're fighting and dying for their right to make a profit from our victory ought to be shoved up the line for a week or so. Maybe they'd realise that we'll expect a little more than sophisticated applause from people with 20 guinea seats and cheap Union Jacks.<sup>70</sup>

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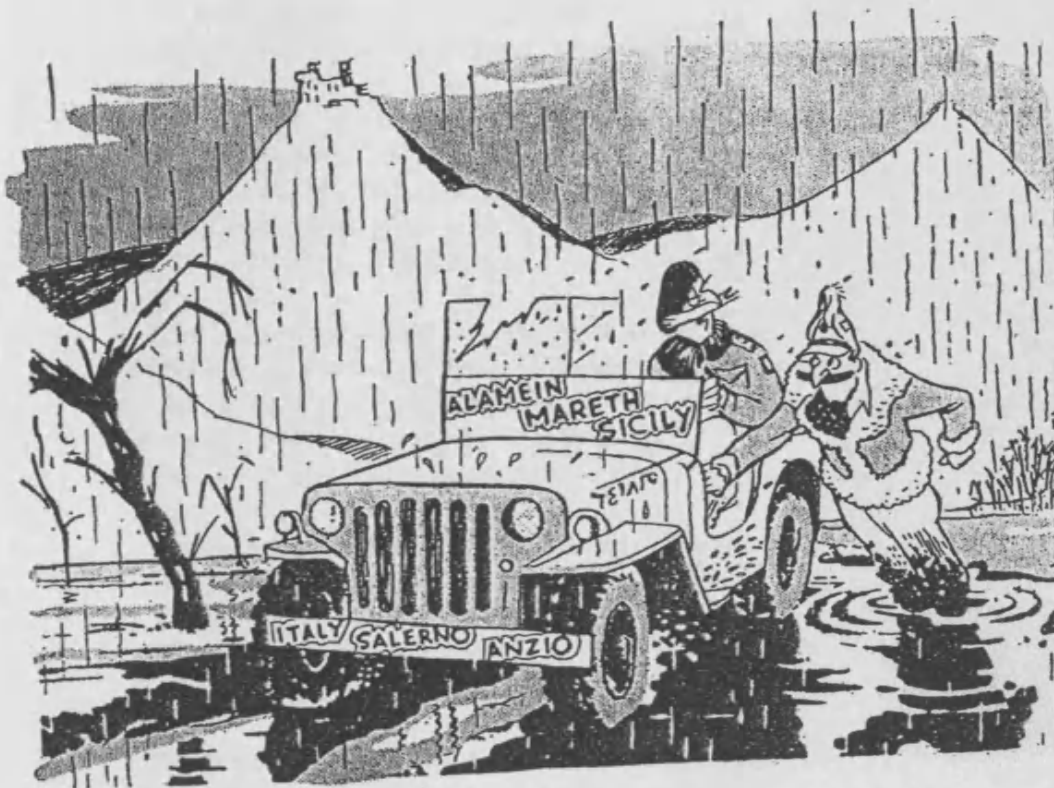
<sup>67</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report by the Assistant Chaplain-General, 4 December 1944

<sup>68</sup> IWM 86/24/1 R.M. Roach, Sunday 20 February 1944

<sup>69</sup> IWM 81/5/1/ N.J. Friskney p. IV/6

<sup>70</sup> IWM 85/34/1 Major J. Harper-Nelson Undated letter





'Which D-Day do they mean, old man?'

## **THE D-DAY DODGERS**

(sung to the melody, 'Lili Marlene')

We are the D-Day Dodgers out in Italy,  
 Always drinking Vino, always on the spree  
 8<sup>th</sup> Army skyvers and the Yanks,  
 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Div and all their tanks,  
 For we are the D-Day Dodgers, the lads that D-Day dodged.

We landed at Salerno, a holiday with pay,  
 Jerry brought the band down to cheer us on our way.  
 We all sung the songs and the beer was free,  
 We kissed all the girls in Napoli  
 For we are the D-Day Dodgers.

The Volturmo and Cassino were taken in our stride  
 We didn't have to fight there. We just went for the ride.  
 Anzio and Sangro were all forlorn  
 We did not do a thing from dusk to dawn.  
 For we are the D-Day Dodgers.

On our way to Florence we had a lovely time.  
 We run a bus to Rimini through the Gothic line.  
 All the winter sports amid the snow.  
 Then we went bathing in the Po.  
 For we are the D-Day Dodgers.

Once we had a blue light that we were going home  
 Back to dear old Blighty never more to roam.  
 Than somebody said in France you'll fight.  
 We said never mind we'll just sit tight,  
 The windy D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy.

Now Lady Astor get a load of this.  
 Don't stand on a platform and talk a load of piss.  
 You're the nation's sweetheart, the nation's pride,  
 But your lovely mouth is far too wide  
 For we are the D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy.

If you look around the mountains, through the mud and rain  
 You'll find battered crosses, some which bear no name.  
 Heart break, toil and suffering gone  
 The boys beneath just slumber on  
 For they were the D-Day Dodgers.

So listen all your people, over land and foam  
Even though we've parted, our hearts are close to home.  
When we return we hope you'll say,  
'You did your little bit, though far away  
All of the D-Day Dodgers out in Italy'.

## V

The BBC was co-opted to strengthen ties between servicemen and home. A BBC unit was sent to formations “for the purpose of ‘Sending messages home’ from troops.”<sup>71</sup> The BBC was at Anzio, recording news items and “Messages for Home” from troops there, but it appears that BBC was not the first choice for radio listeners on the beachhead. The men infinitely preferred listening to the German propaganda station, Radio Rome, than to the BBC. In fact, Radio Rome’s seductive-voiced announcer, Axis Sally, and her companion George were a great boost to morale.

‘Hello suckers’ she would begin. ‘Who has who surrounded?’ Then might follow a list of recent prisoners. Although they were intended to show German success, the lists were rather a source of consolation that some officer or man was not killed, as had been feared, but captured. Then would follow relays of the latest popular tunes from America, and the seductive never-to-be-forgotten strains of ‘Lili Marlene’, the adopted tune of both sides.<sup>72</sup>

One AFHQ Morale Report stated that “Wireless broadcasts by the BBC unfortunately live up to the BBC’s reputation. German and American programmes are much more frequently listened to. There is a very great shortage of wireless sets and spare parts.”<sup>73</sup> Those that could listen to the BBC, however, often found it a great morale booster. Sapper Richard Eke, who was part of a Beach Group charged with clearing a beach and water of obstacles and mines following the invasion of Sicily, remembered that when the Beach Group reached their assigned location on the afternoon of D-Day, they were strafed and bombed continuously by German planes.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> NA WO 170/116 AFHQ Welfare – Sicily & Italy: Progress and Information Report No. 4, 9 February 1944, Item 11, Broadcasting.

<sup>72</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 217

<sup>73</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, Morale Report, undated, but with August 1944 papers, item 3 (b) (iv)

<sup>74</sup> IWM 92/1/1 C.R. Eke, p. 24

Our spirits were suddenly raised by the bewildering sound of a Vera Lynne record blasting across the beach. It was coming from the tannoy speakers, and was followed by 'This is London, and this is the seven o'clock news' ...the first announcement that 'Our forces have landed in Sicily and met only slight resistance' brought derisive jeers from the platoon. But the news that the infantry were holding the main road to Syracuse about three miles inland was the first information we had had of the success of the landing. It was strange that the only information of the desperate advance taking place only three miles from us had to come from London nearly two thousand miles away.<sup>75</sup>

The BBC was the source of almost all of the news the troops learnt of the overall development of the campaign in Sicily and Italy. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division's newspaper, *Front Line*, used the BBC as the basis for its editorial and gave details of all the theatres of war in which the Allies were active.<sup>76</sup> But the BBC was more than just a conveyor of news: it brought the troops closer to home. Like letters, it was an:

... invaluable link with old values and past pleasures. That, I'm sure, is why front-line soldiers go for that "Home" type of nostalgic sentiment – also why Forces Favourites and Messages from Home are such popular programmes. We all listen solemnly to messages from Hartlepool just to hear those homely voices saying silly, ordinary things.<sup>77</sup>

## VI

Recognition of another kind, medals to be exact, also provoked some concern. Several officers told Lt-Col Sparrow, during his tour of Italy in summer 1944, that "it would improve morale if the proportion of MMs to DCMs [medals for Other Ranks] awarded was considerably increased. There is a feeling that the ratio of MCs [only given to officers up to and including Major] is too high."<sup>78</sup> The infantry also believed, rightly or wrongly, that men of the RASC were receiving medals for doing what the Infantry had to do every day

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 26

<sup>76</sup> For examples of *Front Line*, NA WO 169/10289 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Royal Scots Fusiliers War Diary, August 1943

<sup>77</sup> IWM 85/34/1 J. Harper-Nelson Undated Letter

<sup>78</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, Notes of Tour in Italy, June-July 1944

without similar recognition.<sup>79</sup> In a unilateral move, the 78<sup>th</sup> Division overcame this to some extent by producing, in March 1945, a divisional “Mark of Esteem”, a black and gold bar to be worn under the divisional sign. The award was granted to men who performed actions of personal courage or showed devotion to duty above the average and was backdated to cover actions since October 1<sup>st</sup> 1944. “The Mark of Esteem will not be given to those who have already received awards or have been mentioned in dispatches, nor will it continue to be worn if an award or mention in dispatches is subsequently given for the same action.”<sup>80</sup>

## VII

The War Office could do little about leave, and family problems in the UK, but it did try to do what it could about conditions for the soldiers in Italy, especially with regard to one of the soldiers’ major concerns which, from the number of times it was mentioned in letters home and in diaries, was food. The food supplied by the Army in Sicily, despite the regular knee-jerk grouses of the soldiers, was a great improvement over what had been available to Eighth Army in the desert. The rations issued to the troops in the first weeks of both the Sicily and the Italian campaigns were “Compo” (composite) rations, which had first made their appearance in Tunisia.<sup>81</sup> They were far better than anything issued before, and a great contrast to the bully beef and biscuits which were the mainstay of the Desert campaign. The basic compo ration held rations for 14 men for one day, or seven men for two days: 42 tinned meals, sweets, cigarettes and toilet paper, all contained within a wooden box. Under active service conditions biscuits were issued to replace bread. They

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<sup>79</sup> See Selwyn, Davin de Mauny & Fletcher (eds.), *From Oasis into Italy*, p. 219; and Renshaw, *Memoirs of An Army Surgeon*, p. 310

<sup>80</sup> NA WO 170/4988 8<sup>th</sup> Bn The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders War Diary for March 1945 Battalion Orders, 13 March

<sup>81</sup> Ray, *Algiers To Austria*, p. 36

had to be hard, to withstand the rough handling they would suffer, but they were just about palatable.<sup>82</sup>

The tins came in half a dozen different assortments and bully beef was conspicuous by its absence in nearly every kind. Instead, there were tins of Scotch broth, diced vegetable stew, steak and kidney puddings, Spam and the like, not to mention the wonderful tinned puddings – “like mother made” – in several varieties. Even the rice pudding was pure delight.<sup>83</sup>

The food could be eaten hot or cold and it was, according to many soldiers, a palatable diet.<sup>84</sup> The exception were the soya sausages. These became the butt of a long-running joke during the Italian campaign. “It was widely rumoured that the staunch defence of the German Army in Italy was due to a belief that if they fell into our hands as prisoners they would be fed soya-links. It was their determination to avoid such a diet that kept them fighting to the very end.”<sup>85</sup>

The Compo rations were carried in battalion vehicles. Individual soldiers, during an assault landing or when cut off from any other source of supply, carried an Emergency Ration, which could keep a man going for 24 hours. It could be chewed dry or ground into powder and mixed with hot water to be drunk. Additionally, there was the 48 Hour Mess Tin Ration, which was packed into the two halves of a mess tin, and consisted of preserved meat, biscuits and chocolate or boiled sweets. A Tommy Cooker, which used solid methylated spirits, was issued with it for heating the water for hot drinks.<sup>86</sup> There was also a tin which contained tea, sugar and powdered milk already mixed.<sup>87</sup> “The idea was to heat

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<sup>82</sup> Lucas, *The British Soldier*, p. 28

<sup>83</sup> IWM 99/49/1/ B.R. Christie

<sup>84</sup> Selwyn, Davin, De Mauny, Fletcher (eds.), *From Oasis into Italy*, pp. 212-213; and Ray, *Algiers to Austria*, p. 36

<sup>85</sup> Lucas, *The British Soldier*, p. 29

<sup>86</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 3

<sup>87</sup> Selwyn, Davin, De Mauny, Fletcher (eds.), *From Oasis into Italy*, p. 206

the water almost to boiling and then pour in the mixture. The result looked rather like porridge, and it was best strained before drinking through a mosquito net.”<sup>88</sup> The main complaint was that the tea ration was less than the Middle East Field Scale.<sup>89</sup> The Eighth Army was used to brewing up at every possible opportunity and there was much grouching when the order ‘no private brew-ups’, either in camp or on the march, was made in Sicily.<sup>90</sup>

In Sicily fruit was plentiful and was a welcome addition to rations, especially to those Eighth Army veterans whose teeth had loosened in their sockets during the desert campaign through vitamin deficiency.<sup>91</sup> Tomatoes were plentiful, and eggs and fish could always be obtained locally. Fresh bread, baked in Malta, was available in Sicily shortly after the initial assaults, although one battalion noted that the bread issued in the bulk rations was blue and mouldy.<sup>92</sup>

In Italy, the standard ration (Field Service Ration) approved by AFHQ in October 1943, which were issued in bulk and therefore could only be issued when a certain level of maintenance had been achieved following a landing, aimed at providing the British soldiers with approximately four and three quarter pounds of food a day.<sup>93</sup> This was made up of seven and a half ounces of meat (excluding bone), 12 ounces of potatoes, 14 ounces of bread, 12 ounces of fresh fruit and vegetables and another five and a half ounces of dried fruits for puddings or cake. An extra quarter of a pound of special energy-giving food –

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<sup>88</sup> IWM 99/49/1 B.R. Christie, Sicily

<sup>89</sup> NA WO 222/1494 “The Campaign for Sicily”, p. 13

<sup>90</sup> IWM 99/49/1/ B.R. Christie

<sup>91</sup> Renshaw, *Memoirs of an Army Surgeon*, p. 157

<sup>92</sup> NA WO 222/1494 The Campaign in Italy, Medical, p. 13; NA WO 169/10234 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Dairy for August 1943

<sup>93</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 2



biscuits, sugar, chocolate and a little margarine – was added for troops working at high altitude, anything over 2,000 feet.<sup>94</sup>

Dairy produce, eggs, cheese and butter, was almost unobtainable in Italy, or at least in forward areas. One battalion diary reported, when they were in Naples on the way back to the UK, that “butter in place of margarine was included in the rations for the first time since leaving England and we reflected on the advantages of living at the base.”<sup>95</sup> Fresh meat was also very limited. Meat was usually supplied frozen, tinned or dehydrated. Fresh fruit was more readily available, including grapes and peaches, which were “exotic” by home standards.<sup>96</sup> At Anzio food was considered to be good. There was the first issue of bread on February 8<sup>th</sup>, and fresh meat was on the menu in March.<sup>97</sup> Most troops had a hot meal every 24 hours, even in the thick of the fighting and that, according to one soldier, “was one of the most significant features” of the Anzio campaign.<sup>98</sup> Troops were told that “the food position of the civilian population in this area is not good and that any thoughtless depletion may easily make it critical” so “the purchase or acquisition of foodstuffs by military personnel is strictly prohibited.”<sup>99</sup> An amazing number of cattle, however, “attacked” soldiers and had to be killed.<sup>100</sup> A good deal of dried food also found its way onto the beachhead:

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 1

<sup>95</sup> NA WO 170/4980 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Grenadier Guards War Diary for March 1945

<sup>96</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 2

<sup>97</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 133 & p. 217

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 155

<sup>99</sup> NA WO 170/1487 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The North Staffordshire Regiment War Diary for February 1944 Headquarters VI Corps Memorandum, 12 February

<sup>100</sup> D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, p. 312

dried potatoes, milk, fruit, carrots and even meat. There was a new 24 hour ration pack, just evolved, which was entirely dry. The meat, tea, sugar, milk and even porridge being in the form of blocks; they were quite appetising although they tasted quite different from fresh food. There were reports that some men had tried putting all the blocks into a stew in one go.<sup>101</sup>

Dehydrated food, according to the Morale Reports, was not popular.<sup>102</sup> But it was the inspiration behind a Special Item which appeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade News Sheet of March 30<sup>th</sup>:

It is intended to drop thousands of dehydrated paratroops behind the German lines when the second front starts. By this method one bomber can probably carry a complete division of troops, who, on reaching the ground, make for the nearest river and jump in. Within five minutes they will have returned to normal size and be ready for the fray.<sup>103</sup>

There were frequent complains about the standard of British rations compared to American rations. One officers at Anzio rhapsodised over a “glorious treasury of tinned food, such as we hadn’t seen for years, even in England” which the Americans had bequeathed his platoon, but the Morale Committee reported that on the beachhead, “it is noticeable that, in cases where Units have been issued with the American rations, there is great satisfaction when they return to their own British scale again.”<sup>104</sup> The Green Howards also noted that some Americans preferred British food. When the battalion was enduring static conditions on the River Sangro and the men were brought back from forward positions for hot food, the same American sergeant appeared with a contact patrol. “The only time we got any hot

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<sup>101</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 161

<sup>102</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings and Reports, Morale Report, undated, but among papers for August 1944, p. 2

<sup>103</sup> NA WO 170/1471 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Scots Fusiliers War Diary for March 1944

<sup>104</sup> Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, pp. 31-32; NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, undated report within the papers for August 1944, p. 2

chow is when we come over to see your boys,” he said. Generally, in forward areas, the Americans subsisted on K rations.<sup>105</sup>

## VIII

The regular Army food ration was supplemented by the canteens run by either the NAAFI or the CVWW (the Council of Voluntary War Work, which was made up of the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Young Women’s Christian Association, the Catholic Women’s League, the Salvation Army, the Church Army, Toc H, and the Church of Scotland, among others). A mobile canteen was usually allotted to a division by Corps and would work with it throughout. Three YMCA Canteens were attached to X Corps at Salerno, but since there were not enough of them at the start of the campaign Eighth Army were still without any in late October 1943.<sup>106</sup> However, additional canteens were forthcoming.<sup>107</sup> There were four mobile canteens at Anzio at the beginning of April 1944.<sup>108</sup> The appearance of the NAAFI van always raised spirits:

We were amazed when a NAAFI van turned up. It was probably intended as a morale booster because it was only selling chocolate and we got our NAAFI ration in the ordinary way but in such close proximity to the line, and in the rather desperate situation of the bridgehead it was quite an occasion.<sup>109</sup>

The Army Welfare Services considered that during fluid operations the mobile canteen was one of their most valuable assets. “There are still not enough of these, but those which do exist have done splendid work.”<sup>110</sup> From September 1944 there were 56 Mobile Canteens with a 25% bias in favour of forward troops, and 40 static canteens run by the EFI and

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<sup>105</sup> G. Powell, *The History of the Green Howards: Three Hundred Years of Service* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1992) p. 204

<sup>106</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 25

<sup>107</sup> NA WO 170/116 Welfare, Italy & Sicily, No. 18, 23 August 1944, p. 2

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 5 April 1944

<sup>109</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 146

<sup>110</sup> NA WO 204/6703 Welfare – Policy Eighth Army, Letter from Chief Welfare Officer, Eighth Army, 21 June 1944, p. 1

CVWW.<sup>111</sup> One such canteen was the Dutch Cheese, in Forlì, which boasted a bar, lounge, reading and card rooms.<sup>112</sup> It served tea and cakes between 1030-1200hrs; 1300-1500hrs and 1830-2000hrs. It also provided dinner between 1700-2000hrs. In addition to the Dutch Cheese there were three canteens in Forlì; one run by the Church of Scotland, one by the Salvation Army and Tommy's Bar, run by the EFI.<sup>113</sup> Morale Reports noted that services rendered by mobile canteens were particularly praised.<sup>114</sup> One artillery officer wrote home: "This afternoon a worthy woman from Manchester appeared driving a mobile canteen, and stopped in the middle of our gun position during a shoot to dispense tea and cakes."<sup>115</sup> In Formicola, out of the line, the Church Army opened a canteen and "everyone was surprised to find that it was run by a young lady from home."<sup>116</sup> As one battalion was moving up to their assembly area at the start of the May 1944 offensive, Red Cross workers were handing the soldiers a sandbag each containing a few luxuries – an orange, a few sweets, a few cigarettes and a packet of dates. At the same time there was a Salvation Army canteen trying to get nearer to the front, but it was being prevented from doing so by the military police. "I remember the chap in charge of it was maintaining a furious argument with them, to no avail I imagine."<sup>117</sup> Despite this, it was believed possible by the army welfare services that the mobile canteens could operate within a few miles of the front line and as troops advanced the canteens should too.<sup>118</sup> For the final offensive, plans were laid to provide welfare facilities as far forward as possible when operations became mobile once

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, Allocation w.e.f. 25 November 1944

<sup>112</sup> NA WO 170/1389 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Fusiliers War Diary for October 1944

<sup>113</sup> NA WO 170/1419 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for November 1944 Battalion Routine Orders, 21 November

<sup>114</sup> NA WO 163/162 The War Office Committee on Morale, Draft Report of the Committee, the Army Overseas March to May 1944, p. 5

<sup>115</sup> C. Seton-Watson, *Dunkirk-Alamein-Bologna: Letters and Diaries of an Artilleryman 1939-45* (London: Buckland Publications, 1993) p. 206

<sup>116</sup> NA WO 170/1404 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for April 1944

<sup>117</sup> IWM 85/18/1 C.T. Framp, p. 102

more and these worked well.<sup>119</sup> In fact, one mobile canteen looking for the London Scottish strayed into the Fusiliers' front line and was so far up front that it almost ran into the Germans.<sup>120</sup> These visits to forward companies seem to have started very early in 1945. The 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens reported in early January: "Arrival of a Toc H van in the morning is a new idea and one which goes down very well. This is the first time Toc H or any other such organisation has supplied our fwd coys in the line, we are grateful, and hope it goes on."<sup>121</sup>

## IX

Alcohol and cigarettes were also of paramount importance to soldiers. Beer was the first choice of drink among British servicemen, but it was in short supply for most of the Italian campaign. Soldiers turned to other forms of alcohol, and many drank wine for the first time in Italy. At Anzio, wine was available in the cellars under Nettuno. A doctor at Anzio was taken to one of them by the CCS Padre. In the wine vault he saw casks ranged on the muddy floor:

...vast tuns or vats capable of holding many score gallons. There were barrels of all sizes down to the convenient 50 or 100-litre size, which were in such demand among the troops ...The M.P.s did their best to clean up such places, for the risk of contracting diseases in these filthy cellars was considerable. But the wine was required. "A slug of the vino" made a good night-cap, and, being in demand always, it was obtained.<sup>122</sup>

There was also crude brandy, distilled using copper tubing from shot-down German planes.

"A slug of this dubious spirit gave many of those besieged on the beaches a better night's sleep and the courage to face the anguish waiting them the next day."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> NA WO 170/116 Welfare Progress and Information Report No. 9, 19 April 1944, p. 1

<sup>119</sup> NA CAB 106/441 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part IV, The Campaign in Lombardy, 1 April to 2 May 1945, p. 8

<sup>120</sup> IWM 80/46/1 G. Allnutt, p. 150

<sup>121</sup> NA WO 170/5060 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary for January 1945

<sup>122</sup> "With A Casualty Clearing Station at Anzio," *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol. 259, May 1946, pp. 229-310

<sup>123</sup> Taylor, *Front-Line Nurse*, p. 99

The shortage of beer was attributed by soldiers to bad management by the NAAFI, but in fact it was originally due to shipments from Canada being held up by a shortage of bottles.<sup>124</sup> One Morale report pointed out that “the lack of beer is an easy second to long absence from home as a cause of complaint and a source of trouble.”<sup>125</sup> Another Report pointed out that “it is quite clear that if more beer was obtainable, less ‘Vino’ would be drunk, and since the soldier drinks Vino as if it were beer there would be less drunkenness.”<sup>126</sup> As the front line moved further north local breweries were appropriated, but again, it was shortage of bottles which provoked an overproduction and overstocking of beer in the Rome Brewery in the winter of 1944. In order to reduce drunkenness caused by the excessive consumption of wine in EFI clubs, and to relieve the situation at the Rome Brewery, it was decided to issue to certain servicemen’s clubs that proportion of the Rome Brewery’s production that it was not possible to bottle. The effect on the clubs was instantaneous. Wine bars closed, drunkenness as a result of consumption on the premises was eliminated and the number of troops using the clubs on various days bore a direct relation to the beer delivery days.<sup>127</sup>

Cigarettes were regarded by some as “the number one morale booster for our troops.”<sup>128</sup> Huge amounts of scarce dollars were spent by the British Government importing tobacco.<sup>129</sup> Montgomery always travelled with thousands of cigarettes, which he distributed to his troops. The free Victory “V” cigarettes, in purple coloured packets with the yellow letter

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<sup>124</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 27

<sup>125</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, Report for the Quarter ending 31 August 1944, p. 5

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, undated report within the papers for August 1944, p. 3

<sup>127</sup> NA CAB 106/454 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 18, NAAFI/EFI, p. 5

<sup>128</sup> J. Stockman, *Seaforth Highlanders 1939-45: A Fighting Soldier Remembers* (Somerton, Somerset: Crécy Books, 1987) p. 72

“V” on the outside which Montgomery handed out, were “awful”. They were made in India and the tobacco, if tobacco it was (desert veterans believed they were made from camel dung<sup>130</sup>) was coarse and black. Yet they were cigarettes and better than nothing at all.<sup>131</sup> Players were a rarity and could fetch up to a pound for 20.<sup>132</sup> The average basic pay for an OR at that time was two shillings and six pence a day.<sup>133</sup> When the First Army and the Eighth Army finally met up in North Africa, the Desert Rats were not pleased to find that while they were issued with “V” cigarettes and Canadian Rye whisky, the First Army received English cigarettes and genuine Scotch whisky. “Many were the anecdotes told about unsuspecting First men swapping packets of good Players for the ‘Special V Cigarettes’ issued to the Eighth Army.”<sup>134</sup> Troops were issued with tins of 50 cigarettes, which were soon finished, and a shortage of cigarettes could quickly damage a unit’s morale. When there was a temporary shortage of cigarettes, one battalion was reduced to smoking dried leaves wrapped up in blank army forms.<sup>135</sup> In May 1944 the weekly allowance of cigarettes rose to 100 per man, with further supplies for sale in canteens.<sup>136</sup> A highlight of Anzio for one man was not getting V cigarettes.<sup>137</sup>

## X

It was not only a regular supply of mail, food, drink and cigarettes that could influence an individual’s morale. Clothing, living conditions, and recreational facilities also contributed to the physical and mental wellbeing of troops, both in and out of the line, as did a regular

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<sup>129</sup> D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations* (London: Harper Collins, 1995) p. 172

<sup>130</sup> Taylor, *Front-Line Nurse*, p. 40

<sup>131</sup> J. Merewood, *To War with The Bays: A Tank Gunner Remembers 1939-45* (Cardiff: 1st the Queen’s Dragoon Guards, Maindy Barracks, 1996) p. 85

<sup>132</sup> D. Forman, *To Reason Why*, p. 64

<sup>133</sup> P. Roach, *The 8.15 to War: Memoirs of a Desert Rat* (London: William Kimber, 1985) p. 69

<sup>134</sup> Renshaw, *Memoirs of An Army Surgeon*, p. 136

<sup>135</sup> Hillier, *The Long Long Road to Victory*, p. 114

<sup>136</sup> NA WO 170/116 Welfare Progress and Information Report, 17 May 1944

<sup>137</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E.P. Danger, p. 159

supply of news and the feeling that what they were doing was recognised and appreciated. The Army succeeded better in some of these areas than others.

One of the problem areas was undoubtedly clothing. There seems to have been very little thought, while planning for the Italian campaign, as to the type of weather troops might face if they were forced to fight in the mountains during the winter months. "Why was it possible," asked one commentator, "that twentieth-century Englishmen should have been so ignorant beforehand about the climate of another European country?"<sup>138</sup> Large arbitrary cuts in clothing production had to be made in the UK during 1943 due to shortage of labour and raw materials. The effects of this were felt for the rest of the war.<sup>139</sup> Despite setting up a clothing factory in Italy, using local labour, during the winter of 1943-44 the troops lacked sufficient cold-weather uniforms and equipment.<sup>140</sup> At the start of the campaign troops were still in khaki. Soldiers were issued with a pair each of khaki drill shorts and trousers and two pair of boots. Sometime in October 1943, at the discretion of the formation commander, drill changed to wool, with battle dress and greatcoats the order of the day. The change from winter to summer clothing was authorised to start towards the end of April 1944. In addition to the winter and summer uniforms, each soldier was also issued with two blankets and a groundsheet.<sup>141</sup> As winter set in, the first British troops were to experience in Italy, it was quickly realised that the regular uniform issue would not be sufficient. "Battle dress and greatcoats were no protection in such conditions."<sup>142</sup> The standard-issue army boots were not water-proofed, and it was only at the end of October

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<sup>138</sup> Ray, *From Algiers to Austria*, p. 93

<sup>139</sup> NA CAB 101/224 "The British Soldier in Italy", pp. 5-6.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5



that 78<sup>th</sup> Division acquired gumboots as well as battledress, woollen underclothes and greatcoats.<sup>143</sup> Battledress was issued to all British troops in October, but the Medical Officer of 46<sup>th</sup> Division considered that the clothing scale was not adequate and that a second battle dress should be issued “so that sodden suits can be cleaned and given a chance to dry.”<sup>144</sup> There were also problems with the greatcoats and gas-capes in the weather faced by the troops in the mountains: the greatcoats were not waterproof and the rubber gas-capes made men sweat and did not keep out the cold.<sup>145</sup> The Army tried to provide special clothing to meet the cold and wet of the Italian winter, leather jerkins, woollen gloves and mufflers, denim overalls, patrol boots and gumboots, and the allowance of blankets was raised to four per man.<sup>146</sup> But the supply did not meet requirements. “Leather jerkins were issued in the winter but they didn’t have enough to go round, so we used to take it in turn to wear it ...”<sup>147</sup> The jerkins, denim overall and gumboots were in such short supply that when 46<sup>th</sup> Division left Italy at the beginning of March all these items of clothing had to be handed over to the incoming division.<sup>148</sup> Self-help was also the order of the day. Veteran Eighth Army officers brought out their Syrian sheepskins, leather jerkins and flying boots, with woollen mufflers sent over from the UK. There was also improvisation: in the Irish Brigade (78<sup>th</sup> Division) the sleeveless leather jerkin was modified by the addition of sleeves and collar (usually from American army blankets) into an all-purpose jacket. One Sergeant Major improved on the original, however. His sleeves and collar were of panther skin, “acquired from the lord knows where, and, crowning glory

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<sup>142</sup> G. Powell, *The History of the Green Howards: Three Hundred Years of Service* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1992) p. 204

<sup>143</sup> Ray, *Algiers to Austria*, pp. 93-4

<sup>144</sup> NA WO 177/394 Medical Diary – ADMS 46<sup>th</sup> Division October 1943

<sup>145</sup> Bowlby, *Countdown to Cassino*, p. 86

<sup>146</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier In Italy”, p. 5

<sup>147</sup> Hart, *The Heat of Battle*, p. 92

<sup>148</sup> NA CAB 101/214 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 6



'Well, you wouldn't lend me your duffle coat!'

as it were, a muff of the same material provided a decidedly unorthodox and unmilitary effect, even in the forward areas in Italy where regulation 'uniforms' were conspicuous only by their absence."<sup>149</sup>

The following winter, the army tried its best to provide sufficient winter-proof clothing and equipment to keep the men as dry and warm as possible. In most cases it seem to have succeeded. Although a fourth blanket was issued this was felt to be inadequate for the climate and sleeping bags were made available. Battle dress, string vests, Angola shirts, duffle coats, leather jerkins and white snow suits were issued, as were instructions on how best to use them. *Notes on the Uses and Care of Certain Items of Mountain Warfare Clothing and Equipment* advised men to "keep warm in cold weather, never get hot." Windproof smock and trousers were not waterproof, because "if they were the moist air continually given off by your body would condense and soak you, so that you would always be wet even in dry weather." Boots should be greased slightly – never heavily – while still damp. "When quite dry they do not absorb the grease. Fit boots over two pairs of socks and ensure that you can move your toes freely."<sup>150</sup>

Natural wool socks and snow boots were needed if frostbite and trench foot were to be avoided, yet socks, at any rate, were not readily available. "The great sock scandal", as one officer called it, was causing additional misery to men living in unbearable conditions.<sup>151</sup> In December 1944 The Buffs had seven cases of trench foot on one day, and

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<sup>149</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, Vol. II, p. 12

<sup>150</sup> NA WO 170/1347 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Coldstream Guards War Diary for December 1944

<sup>151</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 89

four of these were reinforcements with only one pair of socks each.<sup>152</sup> A world-wide shortage of wool was apparently to blame.<sup>153</sup> The scandal was reported to a visiting MP, who cabled Churchill and “quite a lot of socks turned up rather smartly.”<sup>154</sup> In November 1944 the ADMS 78<sup>th</sup> Division was told that he would be receiving a large consignment of natural grease socks.<sup>155</sup>

British soldiers recognised that his clothing was adequate most of the time, but “he noticed, sometimes as a fact that had to be accepted, sometimes with acerbity, that it could not compare with American or Dominion wear. Shabby material and poor cut were mentioned quite frequently in censorship reports.”<sup>156</sup> Every effort was made, however, to ensure that the troops and their uniforms were as clean as the situation allowed. “Clothes were kept clean by mobile laundries, one of which was usually allotted to each division, and an efficient repair service, run by Italian women, was also provided.”<sup>157</sup> For the soldiers, out of line, there were the mobile bath units. These could be very basic, just a supply of hot water, but one particular mobile bath unit stood out. “It had cover for people who were waiting, with periodicals and papers to read, a Church Army tea car, a barbers shop, and real hot water. Moreover it was British and we wondered why all M.B.U.s cannot be like this one.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> NA WO 177/420 Medical Diary - ADMS 78<sup>th</sup> Division December 1944

<sup>153</sup> NA WO 222/1495 The Campaign in Italy, Medical, p. 153

<sup>154</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 89

<sup>155</sup> NA WO 177/420 Medical Diary - ADMS 78<sup>th</sup> Division November 1944

<sup>156</sup> NA CAB 101/224 “The British Soldier in Italy”, p. 6

## XI

A particularly strong welfare push was promoted in the establishment of clubs in leave towns and rest camps for soldiers at the end of 1944, but this was built on a firm foundation of establishments instituted from the time the Allies landed in Italy. In Naples, for instance, a building in the centre of the town had been rapidly converted into a NAAFI club for ORs. It opened in November 1943 and became known as the Services Club. There was accommodation for 1,600 men in the Lounge and Reading Room and an orchestra played daily from 1400hrs to 1600hrs.<sup>159</sup> The Yacht Club opened in Bari on November 24, 1943, the first of the Other Ranks-only clubs. Fourteen other OR-only clubs opened in Italy during the campaign.<sup>160</sup> The Yacht Club had to contend with a wide range of shortages, from furniture to cups and saucers. At this time a club merely offered a tea, cakes and snack service. With each new club opening the situation improved as supplies were sourced from local manufacturers.<sup>161</sup> The Alexander Club, in Rome, for instance, which opened on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1944, had once been a department store and facilities were available on several floors. On the ground floor there was a restaurant, with a band, where the men could get a meal anytime. There were also cloak rooms, an information bureau and a WVS Help Centre. In the basement there were showers, a valeting service, haircutting, chiropody. On the first and second floors there were snack bars; on the third floor there was a rest room with a small orchestra and a gramophone room. The forth floor had a games room and a shop selling souvenirs. There was a reading room, a library and a chaplain's room on

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>158</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for February 1944 Routine Orders

<sup>159</sup> NA WO 169/10252 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary for November 1943

<sup>160</sup> NA WO 106/454 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 18, NAAFI/EFI, Annexure I.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, NAAFI/EFI, pp. 4-5.

the fifth floor; and a cinema, snack bar and a hairdresser's shop on the sixth floor.<sup>162</sup> The Alexander Club averaged 27,000 cups of tea a day.<sup>163</sup>

In May 1944 a letter issued by the War Office stressed that NAAFI accommodation, "subject to operational requirements ... should be given high priority in order that troops might be appropriately served." Facilities prior to May 1944 were limited to a restaurant, games room, reading and writing room, library, a Soldiers Room, a Corporals Restaurant and certain Staff Quarters. The newly-conceived clubs provided far more facilities, such as shower baths, slipper baths, sundries shops, gift shops, barbers shops, shoe-shine parlours, extended games facilities, gramophone and radio rooms, lecture rooms, piano and other music practice rooms. In addition, the Women's Voluntary Services was introduced to control amenities.<sup>164</sup> By April 1945 there were Super-NAAFI, which offered a voice recording department. For one shilling and nine pence a soldier could send 150 words to family and friends on a tiny recorded disc. The room was very popular with soldiers.<sup>165</sup>

The further north the Allies pushed, the more towns were opened as leave centres. Rome was the favourite. One soldier remembered his visit to the Eternal City:

Sightseeing – all the places Rome is famous for and lots of good food in the clubs that were opening. These were run by N.A.A.F.I. and the welfare organisations like Y.M.C.A., Salvation Army, Toc H and Church of Scotland. These were clubs in the strict sense of the word and nothing was spared to give Servicemen comfort, very cosy surroundings and excellent food and other amenities.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> IWM 82/37/1 E. P. Danger, pp. 245-6

<sup>163</sup> NA WO 170/116 Welfare, Italy & Sicily, No. 18, 23 August 1943, p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> NA CAB 106/454 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 18, NAAFI/EFI, Part II, p. 2

<sup>165</sup> Cook, *Khaki Parish*, p. 258

<sup>166</sup> IWM 81/10/1 H. Buckle, p. 107



'Don't think we'll have much of a leave here, old man.'

Facilities for troops in Florence included 10 hotels; two clubs (one for officers and one for ORs); six restaurants; 2 ORs' Institutes; a canteen and a wine bar; a theatre, three cinemas and an opera house. All the entertainment was free except the Opera, which was operated by a civilian syndicate.<sup>167</sup>

By the end of 1944 the main area for Eighth Army recreation, as well as training, was around Forli. "Forli was a great metropolis, full of canteens and cinemas and libraries, and above all the magnificent Dorchester Club, which provided meals and music and barbers and every conceivable amenity."<sup>168</sup> The Club was housed in a magnificent Fascist building and provided meals and entertainment for anything up to 10,000 men daily. Its scope was terrific. A soldier could do anything there from sending flowers home to his wife to learning to play the piano.<sup>169</sup> Spoleto, used for recreation during the early months of 1945, boasted three cinemas and a theatre as well as various NAAFI and YMCA canteens.<sup>170</sup> By the later stages of the war "Commanders had been educated to press for a high standard of facilities for the troops."<sup>171</sup> The Dorchester Club was but one example – although a shining one – of the welfare facilities which had been steadily improving in Italy over the past year. Furthermore, during December 1944 and January 1945 a drive was started to improve welfare amenities in forward areas. A programme of installing well-fitted clubs, restaurants, libraries and other institutions in forward areas was put in hand and five such clubs for ORs were opening between December 1<sup>st</sup> and January 11<sup>th</sup>.

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<sup>167</sup> NA WO 170/1475 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Sherwood Foresters War Diary for September 1944 Appendix to Battalion Orders No 85, 18 September

<sup>168</sup> Seton-Watson, *Dunkirk-Alamein-Bologna*, p. 260

<sup>169</sup> NA WO 204/10425 "The Irish Brigade", p. 37

<sup>170</sup> NA WO 170/4980 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for February 1945



Rest camps were an important asset in Italy.

At a high level, an invaluable innovation during the winter of 1943/44 was the Divisional Reinforcement Camp. It served both to rest and build-up men suffering from strain and also to receive reinforcements and men returning from hospital. The historian of 56 Division, whose Camp was started by Major-General Templer in December 1943, is of the opinion "that this did more than anything to keep down the number of deserters", and in fact such a Camp was eventually to be included in the War Establishment of a Division.<sup>172</sup>

A common feature of the censorship reports was the frequent and favourable comments regarding leave hostels and other such establishments all across Italy, and particularly the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Rest Camp.<sup>173</sup> The Army Rest Camp at Bari, which opened in early 1944, was well publicised in the Eighth Army News: "It seemed that army welfare was looking up."<sup>174</sup> A party which stayed at the Camp reported it "to be the nearest thing the army has produced to a Butlin's Holiday Camp. They had beer, cinemas, good beds, good food, and a fine time."<sup>175</sup> There was another Eighth Army Rest Camp near Alifi, and 78<sup>th</sup> Division started up its own leave town, called "Axeminster".<sup>176</sup> As the army advanced, so did the rest camps, and the Eighth Army camp moved from Bari to Senegallia in July 1944.<sup>177</sup> There were Army, Division, Brigade and Battalion Rest Camps. The Army Camps near Rome and Florence were built to accommodate 4,000 ORs. All camps aimed at providing cheerful surroundings, meals served by waiters, bathing, outdoor games, a good EFI canteen, comfortable lounges and furniture, a theatre or cinema, and daily transport to the

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<sup>171</sup> NA CAB 106/454 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 18, NAAFI/EFI, Part I, p. 1

<sup>172</sup> NA CAB 101/224 "The British Soldier in Italy", pp.40-41

<sup>173</sup> NA WO 32/15772 The War Office Committee on Morale: Report of the Committee. The Army Overseas March-May 1945, p. 8

<sup>174</sup> NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for February 1944

<sup>175</sup> Ibid

<sup>176</sup> NA WO 170/1368 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diary for April 1944; NA WO 170/1421 6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Royal West Kents War Diary for March 1944

<sup>177</sup> NA WO 277/4 *Welfare*, p. 135

nearest town. No charge was made in any camp for ORs.<sup>178</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Division established a Division Rest Camp at Castel Gandolfo, near Rome and individual battalion Rest Camps were opened for men who had had no leave and for whom places could not be found in the official Rest Camps.

## XII

Entertainment for the troops also came under the auspices of the Welfare Directorate. ENSA, the Entertainments National Service Association, had been set up before the war with the declared aim of “meeting the need for all forms of national service entertainment which experience might show to be required for maintaining public morale.”<sup>179</sup> By the summer of 1944 there were 22 ENSA Parties in Italy. Opera and concerts were extremely popular, and “it is most noteworthy how many men have found that they appreciate good music.”<sup>180</sup> The quality of live shows, however, was variable and some adverse comments on the standard of humour of ENSA shows were made.<sup>181</sup> Despite this, there were calls for additional ENSA shows in Italy, and a number of new Parties arrived in October 1944. The AFHQ Welfare Committee noted that:

Ensa London appear to be most anxious to improve the quality of parties, but to do this to any great extent with existing parties in Italy, would mean withdrawing about 6 companies for re-forming and rehearsing. It is felt that with present lines of communication, quantity is more important than quality.<sup>182</sup>

The ENSA Production department in Italy was also responsible for arranging Italian concert parties, such as the one called “Soho Serenade”, which supplemented those from

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<sup>178</sup> NA CAB 106/453 Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Part V, Monograph 7, Rest Camps, p. 2

<sup>179</sup> NA WO 277/4 *Welfare*, p. 43

<sup>180</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Meetings & Reports, Morale Report, undated, with August 1944 papers, p. 3

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>182</sup> NA WO 170/116 *Welfare – Italy & Sicily Progress & Information Report*, 23 August 1944, p. 2

the UK.<sup>183</sup> By November 1944 there were permanent ENSA shows at Pesaro, Cesena, Forlì and Faenza for Eighth Army, and at Florence, Leghorn and Prato for Fifth Army.<sup>184</sup> There were also special “turns”, such as the Rome Opera Company and other Italian performers. In addition, there were a large number of regimental bands called upon to entertain the troops, and a number of soldiers’ concert parties, under the central control of the War Office and independent of ENSA, which were inaugurated in September 1941 when the Central Pool of Artistes, with a small establishment of 50 other ranks, was sanctioned. Two years later the establishment of the CPA was doubled, and later on, it was doubled again.<sup>185</sup> Central Pool parties were known as Stars in Battle Dress and were a welcome addition to the entertainment available in Italy. Films and newsreels were supplied by both ENSA and the AKS (the Army Kinema Service), and, again, both the quantity and the quality could be patchy. There was a shortage of projectors and films and “demand continued to exceed supply.”<sup>186</sup> Most of the available films were American, but not all. On September 8<sup>th</sup> 1944 the 5<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Guards noted that a “cinema show was held at Rocco, where the programme included a newsreel in Afrikaans which was rather puzzling to understand.” Then, on September 15<sup>th</sup>: “A cinema show was given at Monsummano and the newsreel show was much enjoyed. Although it was ancient enough to include pictures of the Anzio landings, it was not in Afrikaans.”<sup>187</sup>

### XIII

It was not just entertainment that improved morale. The more martial concerns of any soldier, his equipment, also saw an improvement towards the end of the campaign, with a

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 26 July 1944, p. 1

<sup>184</sup> NA WO 204/6703 Welfare Eighth Army, Allocation w.e.f. 25 November 1944

<sup>185</sup> NA WO 277/4 “Welfare”, pp. 50-51

<sup>186</sup> NA WO 170/116 Welfare, Italy & Sicily Minutes of Monthly Entertainments Meeting held at HQ, AAI, 21 August 1944, p. 1

concomitant raising of morale. The shortage of shells, which was peculiar to the Mediterranean theatre in most of 1944, but became a worldwide shortage by the end of the year, was overcome by careful husbandry to ensure that troops in battle were never stinted of artillery support.<sup>188</sup> This was particularly important since British military doctrine emphasized the “policy of expending shells rather than lives”.<sup>189</sup> The demands put on infantry rifle companies, and the lack of reinforcements, meant that “every feasible way of reducing infantry casualties had to be adopted. The most profitable was found to be the increased use of artillery.”<sup>190</sup> But it was not just artillery support that gave heart to infantrymen. The arrival of new equipment, which had principally been developed for the Normandy Landings, prior to the final push in Italy, had an immediate and positive effect.

Never before had we in 78 Division been so well furnished with new and devastating weapons and watching these being used in training – and later in battle – I was struck by the vast changes in methods of waging war; the new, sophisticated weapons not only revolutionised methods, but attitudes too – and confidence!<sup>191</sup>

The new equipment included Crocodiles (flame-throwing Churchill tanks), Kangaroos (armoured infantry carriers), Fantails (tracked landing vehicles), DD (amphibious) tanks, flail Shermans for mine clearance and Arks (mobile bridges). The Kangaroos were of particular importance to infantry morale. In an armoured sweep to clear a pocket of Germans which remained on the Allied side of The Senio, north-west of Faenza, the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Queens used these new carriers and reported: “Our casualties have been 7 men wounded. This small number being entirely due to the Kangaroos armour and our consequent immunity from mines, S.A. fire and everything but direct hits from mortars. On our feet

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<sup>187</sup> NA WO 170/1350 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary for September 1944

<sup>188</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 444-445

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, p. 446, Brigadier A.L. Pemberton

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 447. See also S.A. Hart, *Montgomery and “Colossal Cracks”: The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45* (Westport, Conn., Praeger Series in War Studies, 2000) pp. 92-97

casualties would have been considerable.”<sup>192</sup> Anything that reduced casualties was to be welcomed. Flame throwers, which also helped save Allied soldiers’ lives, occasioned much comment:

Wicked tongues of fire sought out every opening and poured death and destruction into the building among the defenders: not a sight for the squeamish, but then, to be a front line soldier and survive, is not for those of delicate susceptibilities. Earlier in the war, the task of winking out brave, fanatical soldiers would have occupied large numbers of troops considerably longer with correspondingly greater casualties.<sup>193</sup>

#### XIV

The Army’s various morale-building initiatives showed considerable development as the Italian Campaign dragged on. And while it would be unfair to suggest that the Army in any way ignored this area of concern before the invasion of Sicily, since the Welfare Directorate and the Morale Committee had been active since 1940 and 1942 respectively, it must also be noted that it was the manpower crisis and the rising desertion figures which seem to have given a more forceful impetus to morale-building concerns in Italy. That being said, it is also true that the Army in Italy was hampered, in common with other theatres of war and the home front, by a lack of supplies, and that it did its best, within the constraints under which it operated, to maintain the physical and mental wellbeing of the soldiers under its command. It thereby contained, but could not eliminate entirely, the morale crisis experienced by the infantry.

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<sup>191</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B. Tomlinson, pp. 239-40

<sup>192</sup> NA WO 170/5060 2/6<sup>th</sup> Bn The Queen’s Royal Regiment War Diary for January 1945

<sup>193</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B Tomlinson, pp. 260-1

## CONCLUSION

In this study of infantry morale in the Italian campaign, three areas of investigation were posited in the Introduction. Firstly, to what extent did the War Office doctrine, as expressed in *Comrades in Arms* and *The Soldier's Welfare*, correctly identify and weigh the main factors likely to degrade and sustain morale. Secondly, the extent to which the prophylactic measures the War Office doctrine recommended were pursued in Italy; and, finally, their success or failure and the reasons for them.

Both *The Soldier's Welfare* and *Comrades in Arms* laid great stress on the importance of battalion officers in both leading, and ensuring the welfare of, the men under their command. *The Soldier's Welfare* in particular cited leave; messing; health; sexual behaviour; sports and games; entertainment; the NAAFI and other Institutes and canteens; and domestic problems as areas of concern for officers. *Comrades in Arms* added the importance of keeping friends together and grouping men carefully. These were certainly key elements in sustaining or degrading morale, but other areas of concern, not enumerated in either pamphlet, gained in weight during the course of the war and were taken on board by the Morale Committee. These included high casualty rates and lack of reinforcements to replace casualties; continuous noise and exhaustion; an unfavourable climate; primitive and monotonous living conditions; physical illness or the fear of illness; and the feeling of being forgotten and unappreciated.<sup>1</sup> Too long spent in the line and a lack of training and identification with the unit in which the soldier served were also acknowledged as degrading morale.

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<sup>1</sup> Sparrow, *Morale*, pp. 3-4

The prophylactic measures recommended by War Office to maintain morale were actively pursued by most battalions in Italy, but the results were often patchy since outside influences, over which the Army had little or no control, also played their part in degrading morale.

The most important element in maintaining morale was considered by the Army to be strong leadership and good officer-men relations. In Italy the soldiers were perhaps not best served by their political and military leaders. The Italian campaign was, from the beginning, the result of a compromise between the Americans and the British who never constituted a clear, coherent policy in the Mediterranean once the war in North Africa was over and by June 1944, "The British and American Chiefs of Staff were becoming steadily more at odds about the future policy of the campaign in Italy."<sup>2</sup> The failure of the British Commander, Oliver Leese, and the American General Clark, to co-operate with each other fully during the Cassino battles and the run-up to the Gothic Line operation in 1944 "condemned both armies to the 'Winter of Discontent' in grim conditions."<sup>3</sup> Clark's push for Rome, against orders, allowed the German army to retreat in strength to their Gothic Line bunkers, and Leese's insistence on using armour to lead Eighth Army's advances, despite the terrain in Italy being unsuitable for armour, allied to his wildly over-optimistic predictions on the outcome of Operation OLIVE, contributed greatly to the conditions which sapped the infantry's endurance and morale.<sup>4</sup> It was only with the appointment of McCreery to succeed Leese at Eighth Army at the end of 1944 that the situation changed. McCreery "produced more imaginative plans, his final offensive being as well conceived

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<sup>2</sup> Molony, Brigadier C.J.C., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part I (London: HMSO, 1984), p. 290

<sup>3</sup> Carver, *The War In Italy 1943-1945*, p. 317

<sup>4</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part I, p. 290

as it was executed ...”<sup>5</sup> It was McCreery who insisted on his divisions each having sufficient time out of the line to rest, re-train and re-group, and the results of this policy were reflected in the higher morale of 1945.

Army commanders shaped their men’s lives from afar, but it was the junior officers who had the most immediate influence on morale, and while all reports indicated that the majority of officers in Italy were conscientious in the pursuit of their duties towards their men, both in and out of the line, the growing shortage of officers as the campaign progressed played its part in degrading morale. The men with the highest morale, the greatest willingness to fight, were the ones who died first, and young junior officers, who were obliged to lead their men by example, often paid the price for their bravery. Many infantrymen were only persuaded by their officers’ exhortations to go forward into battle rather than follow their very natural inclination to back away from danger. A few officers were not up to the job in Italy; others did not survive long enough to gain the trust of their men; most served their men well. The growing shortage of NCOs as the campaign progressed also impinged on morale. The loss of experienced NCOs, men who could guide junior officers and provide “stiffening” for young infantrymen, often by example, was a serious blow to the fighting fitness of battalions. NCOs, like officers, suffered high mortality and casualty rates. The recognition of this meant that potential leaders from among the ranks of the ordinary infantrymen often refused to consider promotion, particularly as the end of the war came into sight and a return to civilian life beckoned.

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<sup>5</sup> Carver, *War in Italy 1943-1945*, p. 317



The fear of being killed or wounded in action could cripple a soldier's will to fight. Army commanders tried to ensure that casualties were kept to a minimum through the use of heavy artillery bombardments prior to infantry operations, and that was a morale-booster to the man in the front line: no man likes to be thought of as cannon fodder. Casualty rates in Italy varied in intensity across the campaign and across battalions, but in some battles they were particularly severe, severe enough to render battalions incapable of functioning. As indicated in Chapter II, there was not a straightforward correlation between casualties and poor morale, in the form of desertion, particularly in the first half of the campaign. However, over time men became less keen to put themselves in a position where they could become the next statistic, particularly as they knew the war was coming to an end. One NCO recalled that "always at the back of your mind is the thought 'Am I going to be killed'" while an officer said: "Everyone I knew had been killed and it weighs on your mind that your time is coming."<sup>6</sup>

An infantryman's health could be endangered out of as well as in the line. Malaria and VD were the main culprits here. Malaria was endemic in parts of Italy. The whole coastal belt where Eighth Army landed in Sicily was malarious and so was the Catania Plain, where they were concentrated for much of the campaign.<sup>7</sup> A captured document showed that the dangers of this area were known to the Germans and that this might have influenced their tactics.<sup>8</sup> The British, who were initially unprepared for the illness, both on a personal and a corporate level, fell victim in their thousands, and even when malaria discipline was tightened up and measures put in place to eradicate the problem on the ground, relapses added to the army's manpower woes. A sick man cannot fight, whatever the state of his

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<sup>6</sup> IWM Sound Archives 10421 L. Thornton, Reel 21; IWM Sound Archives 13878 R. Collins, Reel 11

morale. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that soldiers deliberately courted malaria, through poor morale, to avoid battle. Nor did they seek to infect themselves deliberately with VD, the principal cause of manpower wastage in 1945, to get out of front-line duty.

High casualty and illness rates pointed up the lack of infantry reinforcements. The shortage of manpower made itself felt from the beginning of 1944: after four years of war the available pool of young conscripts was very shallow. Military leaders must, however, bear some of the blame for the infantry manpower shortage in Italy. They initially underrated the difficulties attendant upon the campaign and the number of reinforcements required. The problem became particularly acute during the Gothic Line battles in the autumn and winter of 1944. The official history pointed out that the rapid decline in infantry strength in the autumn of 1944 was a result of inadequate measures taken earlier in the year to address the problem. The disbandment of existing infantry battalions and the selection of units for conversion to infantry took longer than had originally been anticipated, and by the time these reinforcement reached their intended units, the units had even fewer fit men than expected, so that supply never came close to matching demand.<sup>9</sup> Further insult was added when divisions in Italy were sent away to OVERLORD and then DRAGOON. A direct result of the manpower shortage, the expediency of cross-postings and sending men from hospital to whichever battalion had the greatest need, regardless of regimental loyalties, provoked sentiments ranging from doleful acceptance to desertion and potential mutiny. Esprit de corps, traditionally considered the most vital ingredient in the maintenance of morale by the Army, was eroded significantly during the Italian campaign, which made the

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<sup>9</sup> NA WO 222/1494 The Campaign for Sicily, p. 13

advice proposed in *Comrades in Arms*, of keeping groups of friends together, particularly telling. Battalion officers, particularly towards the end of 1944, endeavoured to do just that, particularly with former AA men who were more often than not unwilling infantrymen and who needed the bonds of group loyalty and friendship to maintain their morale.

The lack of reinforcements resulted in the infantrymen remaining at their posts shouldering an ever-heavier burden, and enduring the never-ending downward spiral of exhaustion, which was “accentuated by the number of attacks to which they were committed which clearly had only slender chances of success, especially round Cassino and in the last winter.”<sup>10</sup> Exhaustion was one of the principal causes of breakdowns. To exhausted men, “every twist of fate which made their lives more disagreeable became exaggerated to tired minds and bodies.”<sup>11</sup> Most sufferers could be treated by a regime of rest away from the front line, but for some nervous strain, fear and exhaustion produced genuine battle fatigue which required far great medical intervention. Exhausted men also became physically ill more easily, and illness was a far greater drain on manpower in Italy than the casualty rate. The conditions in which men lived in the front line, usually spending hours at a time in slit trenches or behind sangars, avoiding the wickedly accurate German mortars, and the weather conditions, as often as not wet and cold, brought on illnesses of exposure: colds, flu, skin and digestive problems, and trench foot. The elements also deeply influenced men’s morale: “When campaigning, one’s well-being, thoughts and feelings were entirely

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>9</sup> Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 449-450

<sup>10</sup> Carver, *The War in Italy 1943-1945*, p. 315

<sup>11</sup> Verney, *Anzio 1944*, p. 154

governed by the clemency or otherwise of the weather.”<sup>12</sup> One soldier, when asked what most adversely influenced morale in Italy, replied succinctly: “The weather”.<sup>13</sup>

Leave, getting away from the dangers and insalubrious conditions of the front line, was cited as a morale-builder in both *The Soldier's Welfare* and *Comrades in Arms*, but both short term leave in Italy and home leave were heavily influenced by the manpower crisis. Most men in the Eighth Army had been out of England for at least two years, some battalions had been away for longer, and they had had no home leave. The length of service abroad was a potent element in diminishing morale, both in terms of an individual's continuing willingness to fight and his mental wellbeing. Newcomers to battalions which had been out of the UK for some time noticed that there was a “subtle peculiarity of psychology” that changed the veterans.<sup>14</sup> They became less intellectually active, more liable to get drunk and more prone to stupid or senseless actions when they came out of the line. The fear of men who had been away from home for years was that they would never see home again, and this grew in intensity the longer the campaign lasted. A doctor remarked at the height of the Gothic Line advance that:

It struck me that these men had lost some of the snap and sparkle they had shown in the Desert days. The answer to this tailing-off of the high spirit and enthusiasm which had been such a wonderful feature of the ranks of the Eighth Army was very obvious, as one went the rounds, asking them how they felt – they wanted home. “Blighty? Where's that?” one veteran explained, in serio-comic style.<sup>15</sup>

In his view, morale began to go down in the last quarter of 1944 owing to a combination of circumstances:

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<sup>12</sup> Horsfall, *Fling Our Banner to the Wind*, p. 19

<sup>13</sup> Conversation (August 2001) with a Regular soldier who fought in the Italian campaign.

<sup>14</sup> Crew, *The Army Medical Services*, p. 540

<sup>15</sup> Renshaw, *Memoirs of an Army Surgeon*, p. 275

First and foremost, the failure of the 'push' to break right through to Venice was a great disappointment. The usual crop of rumours went round: 'There hadn't been a Gothic Line; Jerry had simply lured the army on and held it on the Coriano Ridge'. The advance to Rimini, though steady, was not quick enough for impatient souls. Most of us had now been away well over three years. When would we see home again?<sup>16</sup>

The soldiers often cherished an idealized memory of home, and in their letters to their families would more often than not dwell on the minutiae of domestic trivia such as the colour of curtains and wallpaper, or how they would buy a cottage with a rose trellis around the front door when they got home. Sights or sounds of Italy would recall memories of loved ones. Turning a corner in an Italian lane, or the chiming of church bells, might bring forth "a thousand recollection of home and quiet English lanes and dear ones separated by the fate of war ... then indeed did the agony of one's soul reach its bitterest pang! ... Would we ever see Blighty again?"<sup>17</sup> The men worried about their families back home, but the intensity of their feelings was sometimes not returned in equal measure. Women at home, who were fully occupied in war work or taking care of their children, did not have the same periods of inactivity as soldiers during which they could write letters. A lack of contact, especially a steady stream of letters from family and friends, or unwelcome news, could devastate a man's mental equilibrium and render him incapable of behaving sensibly in battle. He would feel forgotten and unappreciated.

Morale, on a corporate scale, was challenged after the Normandy Landings, when Italy fell out of the news and troops there began to feel that people at home had lost interest in, and were neglecting, them; that the troops in North West Europe were better regarded and given preferential treatment when they were on leave in the UK; and that Italy was considered a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 278

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 240

sideshow, without danger, hardship or importance.<sup>18</sup> They were faced with the “demoralizing influence that they were playing second fiddle to the cross-Channel invasion; that victory was not going to be won by them, and that their sacrifices and suffering were not essential to it and were not appreciated.”<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to keep the Italy at the forefront of the national consciousness, the War Office tried to charm and cajole newspaper editors into publishing more positive stories on the campaign, but they could not compel them to do so. And editors were more interested in publishing news from Western Europe, where the war against Germany would be won. Some men in Italy resented the belief expressed in the British press that they were sitting pretty in Italy, doing little for the war effort, but others seem to have taken it in their stride, even gloried in the soubriquet of ‘D-Day Dodger’. This melded the troops together, gave them a bitter-sweet group identity and cohesion, on a large scale, that was lacking, by the later stages of the war, in many battalions.

The conflation of elements over which the War Office had little or no influence, encompassing the number of casualties; illness; domestic worries; the belief that their efforts were unappreciated and unrecognised by people whose approbation was needed to encourage the soldiers to carry on fighting; a dearth of junior officers and NCOs; the lack of reinforcements and consequently too few infantrymen working themselves into ever-greater levels of exhaustion, converged in the winter of 1944/45, to produce an inescapable outcome: war weariness. This is reflected in the desertion figures.

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<sup>18</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945, p. 1

<sup>19</sup> Carver, *War in Italy 1943-1945*, p. 325

The desertion rate was regarded as a key indicator of the state of the army's morale. Every book on the Italian campaign pointed out the fact, in greater or lesser detail, that during the campaign desertion was a major problem and the inference, although never explicitly stated, is that the British infantry was inadequate to the task it was facing, that British infantrymen were deliberate deserters, that their morale was totally degraded and they had no will to fight. There were undoubtedly men in the British infantry who did not see the need to face the same front-line dangers as their comrades, who preferred to wait out the war in prison, but opinion at the time, from both the War Office and front-line soldiers themselves, indicate that the causes of desertion were varied and many, and that cowardice was not the most potent motive.

There is no accepted 'norm' for the level of desertion, only a suggestion, by Lt.-Col Wigram, as to what might be expected. The number of deserters at the start of the Italian campaign fall well within the suggested parameters, rose when the soldiers got their first taste of the worst winter in Italy in living memory, dipped as the weather began to improve, then rose again during the terrible battle conditions of Cassino and Anzio. The failure of the Gothic Line operation, after such high expectations, condemned the infantry to another winter of static warfare, soul-destroying patrolling, exhaustion and growing war weariness. Many men could no longer muster the necessary endurance. For most of them, it was not so much an unwillingness to fight, more a temporary loss of the mental and physical stamina necessary to sustain bellicosity. The end of 1944 was "pathetic" and the early days of 1945 were marked by "sickening numbness and apathy," when the Italian campaign "seemed doomed to suffocation under the pillow of its apparent unimportance and

irrelevancy.”<sup>20</sup> Yet this was a seasonal phenomenon. From January 1945 many of the ‘involuntary’ deserters returned to their units of their own volition and one Morale Committee Report stated that many of the petitions received from soldiers under sentence “contain a statement that the man wishes to return to the line and redeem himself.” Anxiety about their position in relation to the release scheme equally influenced their decision.<sup>21</sup>

Victory depends not so much on the number of men killed as the number demoralized.<sup>22</sup> To deal with the every growing number of deserters, the Army put into effect various ‘carrot and stick’ initiatives. The stick was charging absentees with desertion when their push for the re-introduction of the death penalty for desertion failed. However, all attempts to reduce the desertion level by punitive measures failed. Deserters either deliberately sought to avoid front-line action by whatever means, including a prison term, or their need to escape an untenable situation was so great that no threat could sway them.

The ‘carrot’ initiatives were all aimed at boosting the soldiers’ general feelings of wellbeing, giving him peace of mind and as much comfort as possible, at least when out of the line. In this the Army was far more successful, certainly if the Morale Reports are to be believed. In the area of welfare the Army, from top to bottom, must be deemed to have been successful as far as was possible within war-time constraints. The welfare programme was organic in nature, growing apace from 1939 as time and circumstances allowed. By the time the Allies landed in Italy, the basic framework had been put in place. An adequate mail service, so important to soldiers’ peace of mind, had been established and generally

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<sup>20</sup> Harpur, *The Impossible Victory*, p. 101

<sup>21</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945, Desertion and Absence, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry*, p. 166



worked well throughout the Italian campaign. Rest camps and leave centres were speedily established; a great deal of time and effort was given to ways and means of ensuring that the British serviceman had cigarettes and beer, although there was always an insufficient supply of the latter. A memo to Major-General Robertson, Chief Administrative Office, AAI, about the need to build up the morale of the troops during the winter of 1944/45 pointed this out. Beer “is very important. Present supplies are woefully inadequate, and there is a lot of complaining about it.”<sup>23</sup> Reports indicated that the number of complaints were reduced with an increase in the supply of beer “which now amounts to one bottle per week per man, and more in the case of forward troops. Draught beer is also being served in some EFI Clubs.”<sup>24</sup> The initial unpopularity of EFI diminished over the course of the campaign, “and the growing number of luxury type clubs are greatly appreciated. Some criticism continues that resources and efforts are too much concentrated on these clubs and upon large towns generally, but this has diminished since EFI have been able to follow the advancing troops more closely and more quickly. Forward commanders are now giving special priority to EFI requirements in newly captured towns, to the great benefit of their troops.”<sup>25</sup> Army food was adequate: indeed many men had no complaints. Uniforms were a different matter; the cut and material of the battledress lacked style. More serious was the lack of special cold-weather clothing and sufficient socks and waterproof boots. The Army did what it could, but in some areas their options were limited. They could not overcome world-wide shortages of materials and goods which affected the military and civilian alike.

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<sup>23</sup> NA WO 204/6701 Memo to Major-General Sir Brian H, Robertson, 29 September 1944

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, AFHQ Morale Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945 Section 4, Welfare and Entertainment, p. 3

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

As well as the Army Council and Army commanders, divisions and battalions did their best to ensure their men's comfort and wellbeing. Most divisions established their own 48/72 hour rest camps "and many of these are quite first class. They are of course much appreciated by the men, and the fact that it is their own 'Show' acts as a fillip to 'esprit de Corps'."<sup>26</sup> Battalion sporting arrangements were encouraged: "football matches, of which both the players and the onlookers cannot have enough, are without doubt, extremely important for morale."<sup>27</sup> Another morale-building initiative at battalion level, which sought to encourage esprit de corps, and gave men the opportunity to air their grievances, or have a laugh, were battalion newspapers. The editors of *The Dragonette*, the 5<sup>th</sup> Buffs newspaper, encouraged the men to contribute:

Now we've finally got our paper going, lets keep up the good work and there is no limit to the dizzy heights to which we may climb. Just imagine your articles, comments and opinions being quoted in 'The Times'! Don't be faint-hearted because you have done nothing of the kind before, we know what you can do because we've censored a few thousand of your letters in our time ... This is your paper more than any other and its what you have to say that we want to print.<sup>28</sup>

The success of the measures Army commanders took to deal with morale problems can best be summed up as patchy. Within the resources available to them, and in areas where they had influence, the War Office and officers in Italy worked hard to ensure the comfort of their troops, and welfare arrangements improved considerably as the campaign progressed. They could not, however, provide a panacea for war weariness. The end of the war was needed for that.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, Morale Report from Assistant Chaplain-General to HQ, AAI, 4 December 1944, Leave, p. 3

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, Recreation and Amusements, p. 3

<sup>28</sup> NA WO 170/1368 5<sup>th</sup> Bn The Buffs War Diary for April 1944 *The Dragonette*, No. 3, April 1944, p. 1

Morale, as was suggested before, can be likened to an india rubber ball, and this property was clearly exhibited towards the end of the Italian campaign as desertion started to fall. As one commentator put it: "We were certain now that the end was approaching, and such knowledge buttressed morale like nothing else could do."<sup>29</sup> The fact that active operations during February 1945 were on a small scale and that weather conditions had improved were also contributory factors.<sup>30</sup> A new optimism became pervasive. Even deserters seem to have been infected with a fresh spirit and reappeared from their private winter quarters in time for the spring offensive. Some were sent to detention centres. But most were returned to their units rather than being brought up before a FGCM. The battalions either distributed the deserters among the platoons, or concentrated them in a single platoon, with the best NCOs and a top rate platoon commander. "This worked wonders."<sup>31</sup>

In February 1945 battalion diaries started mentioning morale on a positive note once again.

One, for instance, stated:

During this period in spite of its being a defensive position the morale of the rifle company was very high indeed. This was due to a number of reasons, there was not much enemy shelling and mortaring, casualties were light and there was enough to keep people busy without tiring them out, wiring digging, improving positions and so on. Above all everyone fired their own weapons a great deal as there was no restriction on small arms ammunition, this gave people something to do and gave them the feeling that they were hitting back.....Before the bn had almost always experienced a considerable degree of superiority either on the enemy side or on our own, but here both sides were roughly equal and as time went on everyone felt that we were slowly but surely getting the better of the enemy and causing more casualties than we suffered ourselves."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Horsfall, *Fling our Banner to the Wind*, p. 212

<sup>30</sup> NA WO 204/6701 AFHQ Morale Committee Report for the Quarter ending 28 February 1945, Desertion and Absence, p. 2

<sup>31</sup> Morris, *Circles of Hell*, p. 421

<sup>32</sup> NA WO 170/5044 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The London Irish Rifles War Diary for February 1945

The withdrawal of formations from operations at the beginning of 1945 for rest, reorganisation and training gave the troops a welcome breathing space. "This, together with the successful progress of the war on other fronts has raised morale to a high pitch."<sup>33</sup>

A War Office representative visited Italy in April, just before the start of Operation GRAPESHOT, and reported back that:

.....I went to Italy convinced that I should find embittered troops unwillingly joining in a battle in the outcome of which they had no confidence. Nothing could have been further from the truth. I spoke to men of various regiments and different arms both at Headquarters and in units ... Nowhere was I told tales of woe. Everywhere they felt there were on the last lap and that they would make the Germans pay a price for having held them up so long.<sup>34</sup>

By the start of the Spring Offensive morale was high and "a sense of purpose pervaded the Army; the number of soldiers reported absent in April 1945 was the lowest for any month since the landings in Italy."<sup>35</sup> Lt.-General McCreery believed that the British soldier was "the meat in the stew ... the most solid part", and attributed the success of the Final Offensive in Italy to the "magnificent fighting spirit, endurance and gallantry" of his men.<sup>36</sup>

Italy was, par excellence, an infantry war. The troops fought a long slogging battle over mountains and across rivers, in often appalling conditions, yet still managed to find that last gasp of courage sufficient to finish what they had started with the invasion of Sicily so many months previously. One of the best tributes they could have asked for came from a non-Infantry 78<sup>th</sup> Division officer:

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<sup>33</sup> NA WO 32/15772 The War Office Committee On Morale Report of the Committee, Part I, The Army Overseas, December 1944-February 1945, p. 2

<sup>34</sup> NA WO 106/3961 Report on a Liaison Visit to the Mediterranean Theatre by GSOI, MO5, 4-17 April 1945, Morale and Welfare Arrangements, 22 April 1945

As any division soldier will confirm, the salt of the earth in this last war, as in others, was the infantryman ... all those who made up the establishment of a Division will be as one in lauding the prowess of the infantryman..... In the maelstrom of the battlefield, there is no substitute for valour, the courage of the man at the "sharp end", with nothing and no one between him and an equally brave and determined adversary. Salute the brave; salute the infantryman ...!!!<sup>37</sup>

Morale, which had dipped somewhat, despite the Army's best efforts, was re-invigorated at the end of the campaign:

...all knew that this was not just another battle but the battle to end all battles in this conflict. Oddly enough (and this is one more tribute to the discipline, skill, and self-assurance of the British soldier) the near certainty that this was to be the final fling and therefore the last time he would be called upon to face danger and death, made not the slightest difference to his attitude; no hanging back because it would be a pity to "cop one" at the eleventh, or even the twelfth, hour: no reluctance, no temporising; the preparations and the approach were exactly the same before the during this battle as in many others he had seen.<sup>38</sup>

There are some obvious parallels between the state of morale and its influences explored by the secondary literature for the First World War and those examined in this thesis for the Italian campaign. Firstly, the importance of the paternal officer-men relationship in sustaining morale which Gary Sheffield examined for the 1914-18 War, and which the War Office put first in its pantheon of morale-boosting suggestions in 1942, was as relevant in Italy as it had been on the Western Front.<sup>39</sup> There is, however, no documentation with regard to the Italian campaign to support Sheffield's contention that the drawback to officer paternalism was that an officer could identify too closely with his men which could, in turn, lead to a reluctance to take aggressive action against the enemy. The high turn-over of both infantry officers and men, particularly towards the end of the Italian campaign, might account for this. There was often no opportunity in the front line for officers to get to know

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<sup>35</sup> Doherty, *A Noble Crusade*, p. 288

<sup>36</sup> Harpur, *Impossible Victory*, p. 128; McCreery, "The Final Offensive", p. 13

<sup>37</sup> IWM 90/29/1 J.B Tomlinson, pp.270-1

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 239

<sup>39</sup> See, Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*; and *Comrades in Arms*, first lecture

their men well enough that their safety was of more importance than the prosecution of battle.

Timothy Bowman and Gerard Oram argued that the death penalty as an exemplary measure in the First World War was replaced, as the war progressed, by a more lenient approach to discipline. The reasons for this were two-fold: either it was the result of troops enduring appalling conditions with a concomitant lowering of morale; or it was because the automatic consent of the British soldier could no longer be taken for granted.<sup>40</sup> The same pattern, without, of course, recourse to the death penalty, can be traced in the Italian campaign. The abolition of the death penalty was lamented by many of the commanders in Italy, but the early policy of exemplary sentencing there did not have the desired effect of lessening desertion, any more than the imposition of the death penalty had in the previous war. By the end of the Italian campaign many deserters were being returned to their units without even first stopping at a detention centre. This was, in essence, a repeat of the development of a more lenient disciplinary policy dictated by circumstances.

Oram, Fuller and others emphasised the growing importance of bottom-up influences in the maintenance of morale in the trenches.<sup>41</sup> This lesson was taken on board by the War Office early on in the Second World War and by the start of the Italian campaign the Welfare Directorate was firmly established and *The Soldier's Welfare* was a tenet of army life. Top-down welfare arrangements in the Italian campaign were matched by bottom-up, battalion level endeavours.

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<sup>40</sup> See Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War*; and Oram, "Pious Perjury".

Identification by soldiers with the wider society, according to Tony Ashworth, influenced combat behaviour in indirect but positive ways in the First World War.<sup>42</sup> This was true at the start of the Italian campaign, but, once the eyes of the world turned from Italy to Normandy in 1944, the wider society's indifference to their sacrifices might well have seriously degraded infantry morale. But comradeship among the soldiers fighting in Italy turned the soubriquet D-Day Dodgers from a term of disparagement to a badge of pride, although some men did wonder what they were risking their lives for. In fact, the soldiers were overwhelmingly fighting, not for King and Country, but for their mates.

There are areas of the Italian campaign, however, which did not run along parallel lines with the Great War on the Western Front. This is particularly true of the weather and length of service/time away from home. The average British soldier was unfamiliar with mountains and ill-equipped to fight in them, particularly during the two worst winters in living memory. Many veterans' most vivid memories are of snow and mud, the two elements which controlled their lives for so much of their time in Italy. Both sapped humour and health, and consequently morale. The other degrading influence on morale was the length of service for many of the soldiers in Italy. Many of the Regular soldiers had been stationed in the Middle East in 1939 and had remained in North Africa or the Middle East before the start of the Italian campaign. Others had left the UK at a later date: 78th Division, for instance, had left the UK to take part in Operation TORCH in November, 1942. Some reinforcements had come to Italy direct from the UK in 1943, but these were a drop in the ocean compared to the overall number of British soldiers in Italy. Most of these

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<sup>41</sup> See Oram, *Military Executions during World War I*

<sup>42</sup> Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918*.

men were ineligible for home leave until 1944 and the impact of this on morale was impossible to quantify, but was recognized as a deleterious influence on fighting spirit.

Despite suffering similar morale-degrading conditions commented upon by the secondary literature for the First World War, and also enduring hardships peculiar to the Italian campaign, the D-Day Dodgers rose magnificently to their final challenge. Victory in Europe was announced on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945, but the D-Day Dodgers had had the satisfaction, six days earlier, of being the first Allied army in Europe to accept a German surrender.

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**APPENDIX I**

**Prophylactic Ablution  
Centre**

EQUIPMENT

Apart from the structural fittings - which will include an efficient means of supply of hot water - and the medical stores, very little is required. A table and a few chairs for the orderlies, six buckets, cleaning utensils.

EQUIPMENT

	<u>Class A PAC.</u>	<u>Class B PAC.</u>
Towels, roller	6 doz.	4 doz.
Sterilizer (for sterilizing syringes & bowls)	1	1
Forceps sterilizer, Cheatles	1	1
Bowls, E.I. 10"	24	12
Stove, Primus	1	1
Syringes, Urethral 10cc with rubber bulbs	24	12
Brushes, hand-scrubbing	6	4
Sheaths, (rubber preventive)	5000	2500
Capsules, (preventive)	10000	5000
Envelopes for E.T. Packets	5000	2500
Soln. Hydrarg Perchlor, 1/1000 or tablets for preparation of the soln.		
Soln. of Argent Protocate (Argyrol 2%).		
Soap, Soft & Hard.		

TECHNIQUE TO BE USED

The following procedure will be followed by the patient, supervised, instructed and helped by the orderly. Clear instruction in non-medical terms, using illustrations, should be placed so as to be in front of each patient as he performs the disinfectant ritual.

1. Patient urinates in gushes.
2. Removes the trousers and pants.
3. Washes the hands.
4. Washes the penis, scrotum, lower abdomen and front of the thighs with soap and warm water, raising a profuse lather & rinses off the soap. Foreskin to be retracted fully during this process.
5. Sponge for 2 minutes with 2ozs of 1/1000 Hydrarg Perchlor soln. using a bowl and small pieces of wool. Special attention given to frenum and coronal sulcus.
6. Orderly injects 5cc of 2% Argyrol into urethra. The patient retains this for 2 minutes by compressing the glans. Argyrol allowed to escape (only essential in cases where an hour or more has elapsed since exposure).
7. Apply contents of capsule of Calomel-Oxycyanide Cream. Rub in thoroughly over penis, scrotum and surrounding parts, giving special attention to coronal sulcus (Collar) frenum (Bridle String) and meatus (mouth of pipe).
8. Cover genitals with paper or single thickness of cotton or gauze.
9. Patient is instructed not to urinate for several hours.

RECORDS

A record of total treatments and of ET Packets or condoms issued is desirable.

The patient should be given a small ticket on which is recorded his attendance - Names and Units should not be recorded unless specially required

AREA

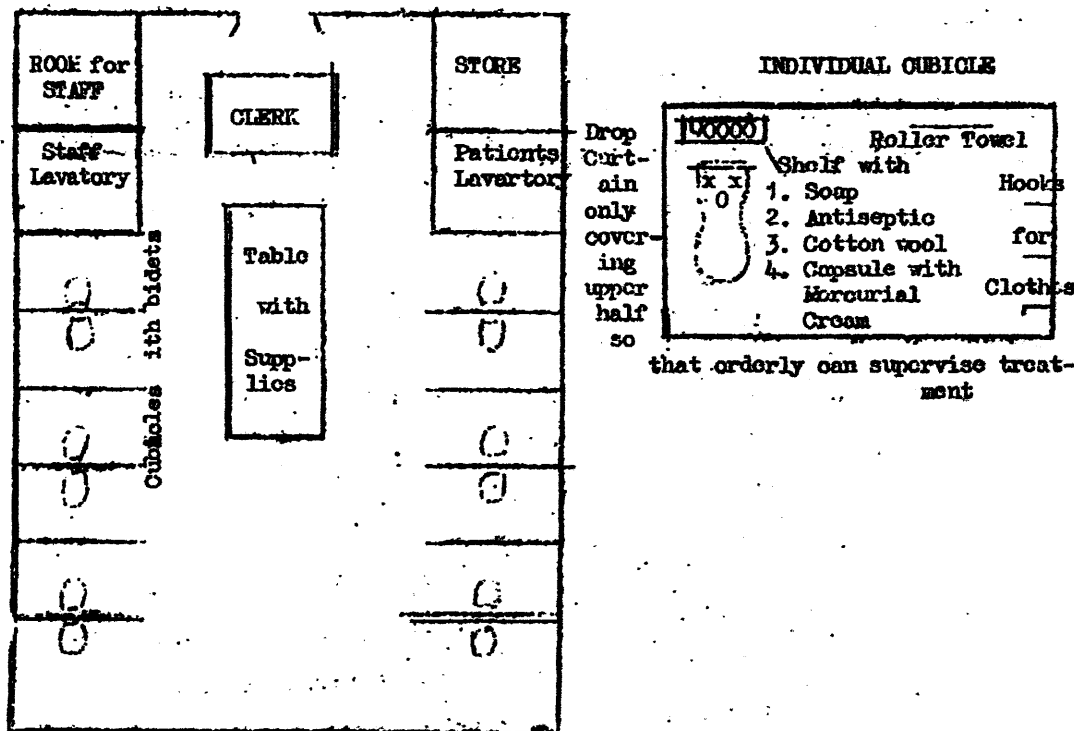
In every area where troops may become infected with V.D. it is the responsibility of the area administration to provide adequate prophylactic treatment facilities, which will be supplementary to and will not replace Unit 'ET' Rooms.

The centres provided will be of a high standard and the number required will be decided by Command or A.F.H.Q.

- (a) SITES. This will be close to the localities in which troops congregate for recreation or transport. The centre must be easily located, even by strangers to the area, both by day and night. Suitable signs will be provided to make it recognisable and to point out the route. The location of centres should be advertised by notices in Camps etc., and by provision of Town Maps, on which the site of P.A. Centres is marked.

The standard set must be that of a Medical Clinic and not that of a makeshift latrine. The premises must be well lighted, well ventilated with good drainage and water supply. Provision of a hot water supply is necessary, and also latrines for staff and patients.

- (b) A sketch plan of a suggested design is given but this must be adapted to the premises available.

SIGN

The provision of a bidet in a small cubicle is considered much preferable to men standing over a trough or urinal. The patient should face so that the orderly can supervise. Antiseptic (1/1000 Hyd. Perochlor) should be given to each individual in a small bowl along with small plugs of wool. A large stock of towels are required - I advise roller towels placed at such a height that a man cannot use them for drying the genitals.

The number of cubicles provided will depend on the number of attendances expected - it is better to err on the generous side for it is very undesirable to keep men waiting for attention. A Class 'A' Centre should have 12 cubicles and a Class 'B' Centre 6 cubicles.

Staff

The present War Establishment ( Middle East W.F. )

<u>Class A</u>	<u>Class B</u>
1 Sgt. RAMC (STO)	1 Cpl. RAMC (STO)
1 L/Cpl. RAMC (STO)	4 Ptes. (Regimental)
8 Ptes. (Regimental)	

All these men may be of low medical category.  
Responsible and trustworthy men are required.  
The staff of P.A. Centres is provided under A.F.H.Q. arrangements.

SUPERVISION AND ADMINISTRATION

Administration of P.A. Centres is an area responsibility, and these are miscellaneous non-medical units, which are to be administered by the nearest convenient unit. The equipment and stores should be taken on charge by this unit. The officer in medical charge of the administering unit will be responsible for replenishment of Medical Supplies. Regular supervision and inspection of the management of the Centre, both by Combatant and Medical Officers is essential. These units should not be placed under C.M.P. control.

Regular hours of duty, with adequate facilities for meals and off duty to be arranged. The nature of the duties makes it desirable to exchange personnel after 3-6 months. This should be staggered.

UNIT E.T. ROOM

This may be set up in a small tent, or if the unit is static a more elaborate building may be provided. In Camps and Barracks one larger E.T. Room near the entrance may provide for all units within the Camp. The E.T. Room should be accessible but not conspicuous, a site near the M.I. Room is often excellent, but part of a latrine is not satisfactory.

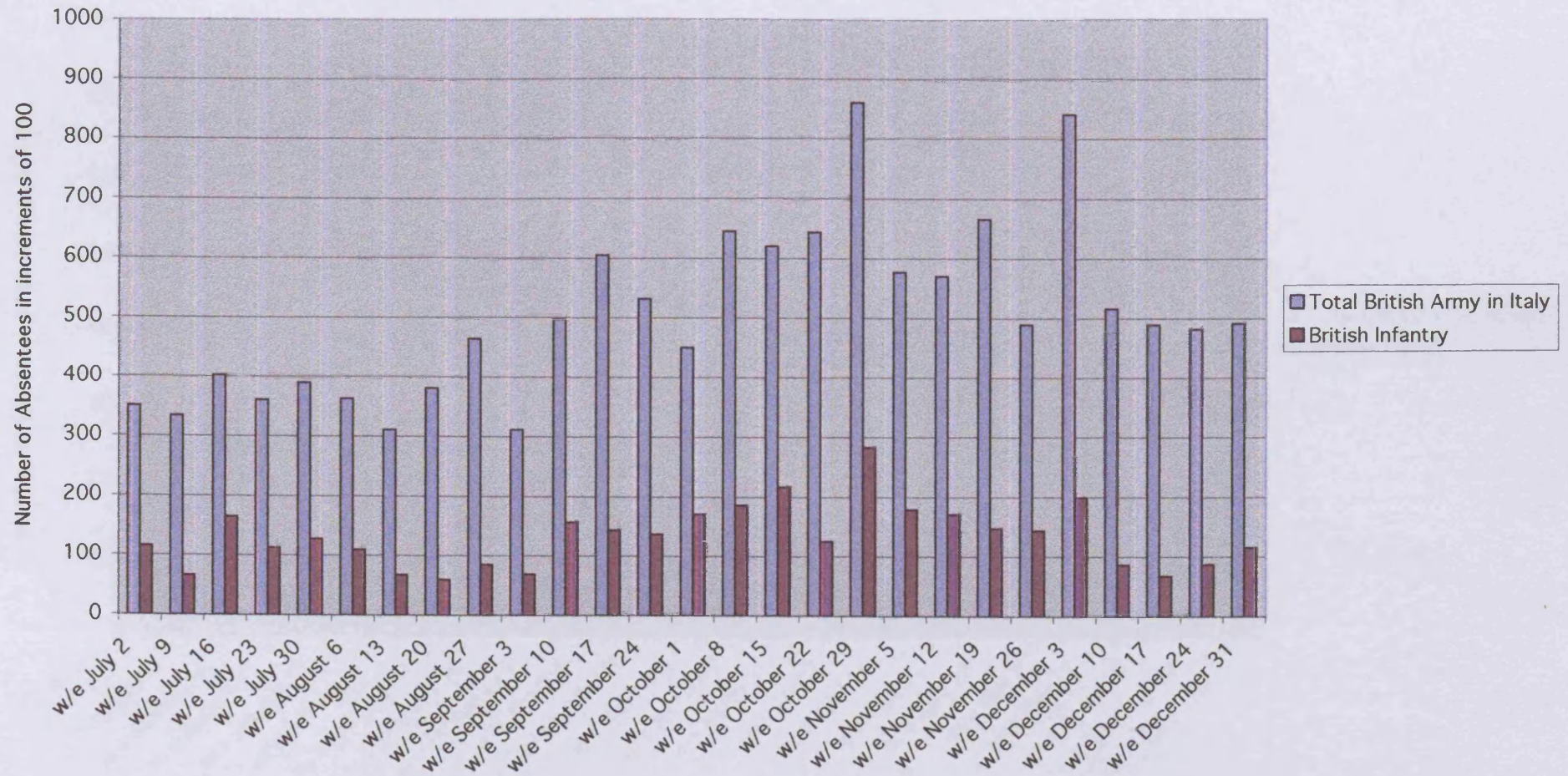
Orderlies must be trained by the Unit M.O. in the details of E.T. technique, and a duty roster prepared. These men must be found within the establishment of the Unit or Camp. The E.T. Room is a convenient means of distribution of E.T. Packets and condoms.

The technique advocated is the same as that in a P.A. Centre so far as the facilities permit. Where supervision by medical staff is not close, 1/400 Pot Permang will be substituted for Hydrarg Perchlor Lotion. The minimum essential requirements are a supply of clean water, soap, a bottle of antiseptic, cotton wool, a supply of capsules of calomel cream and receptacles for used water and wool etc.

## **APPENDIX II**

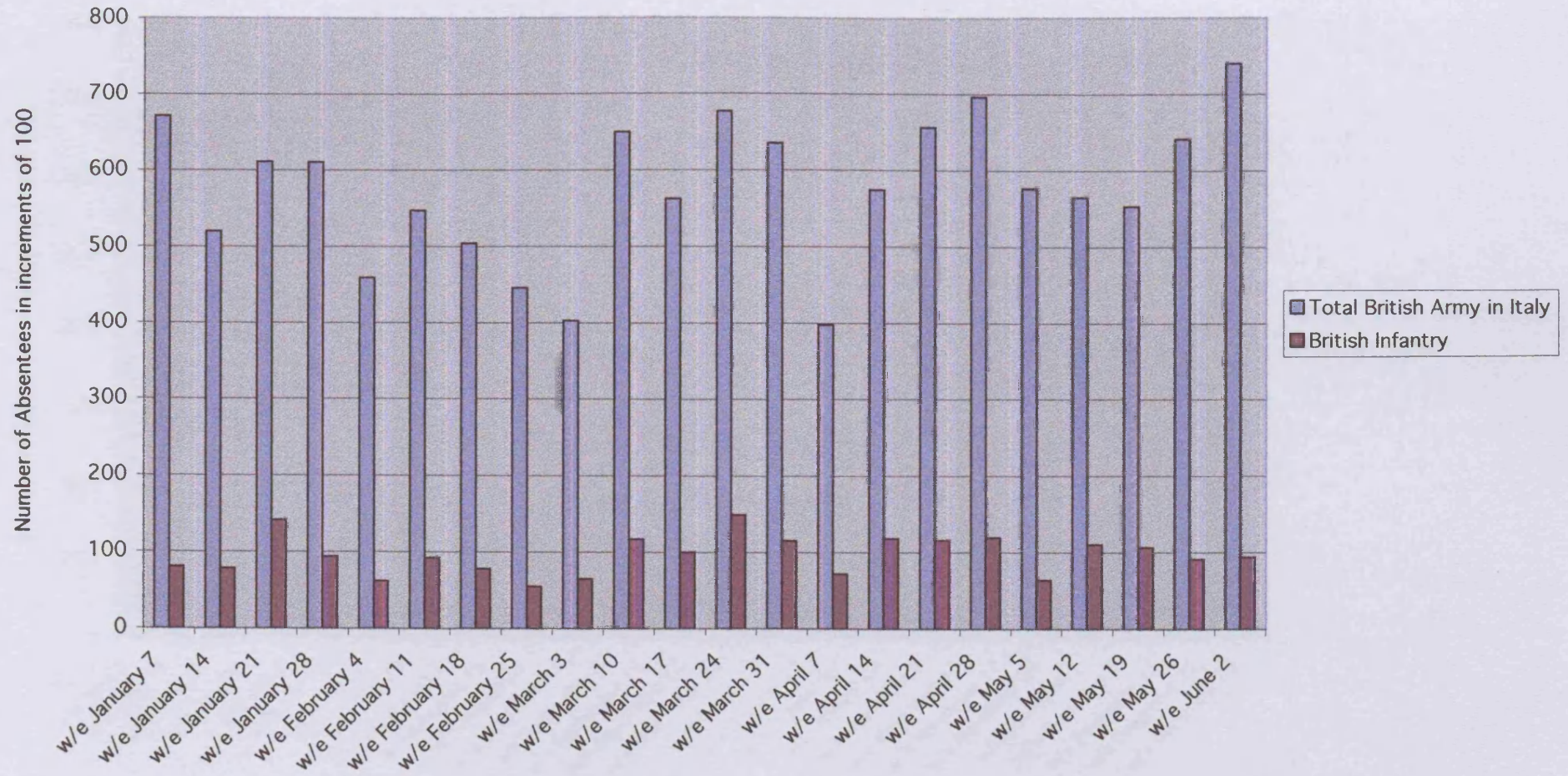
### **Comparison of Absentees: Infantry and Total British Army in Italy July 1943-May 1945**

COMPARISON OF ABSENTEES:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JULY-DECEMBER 1943



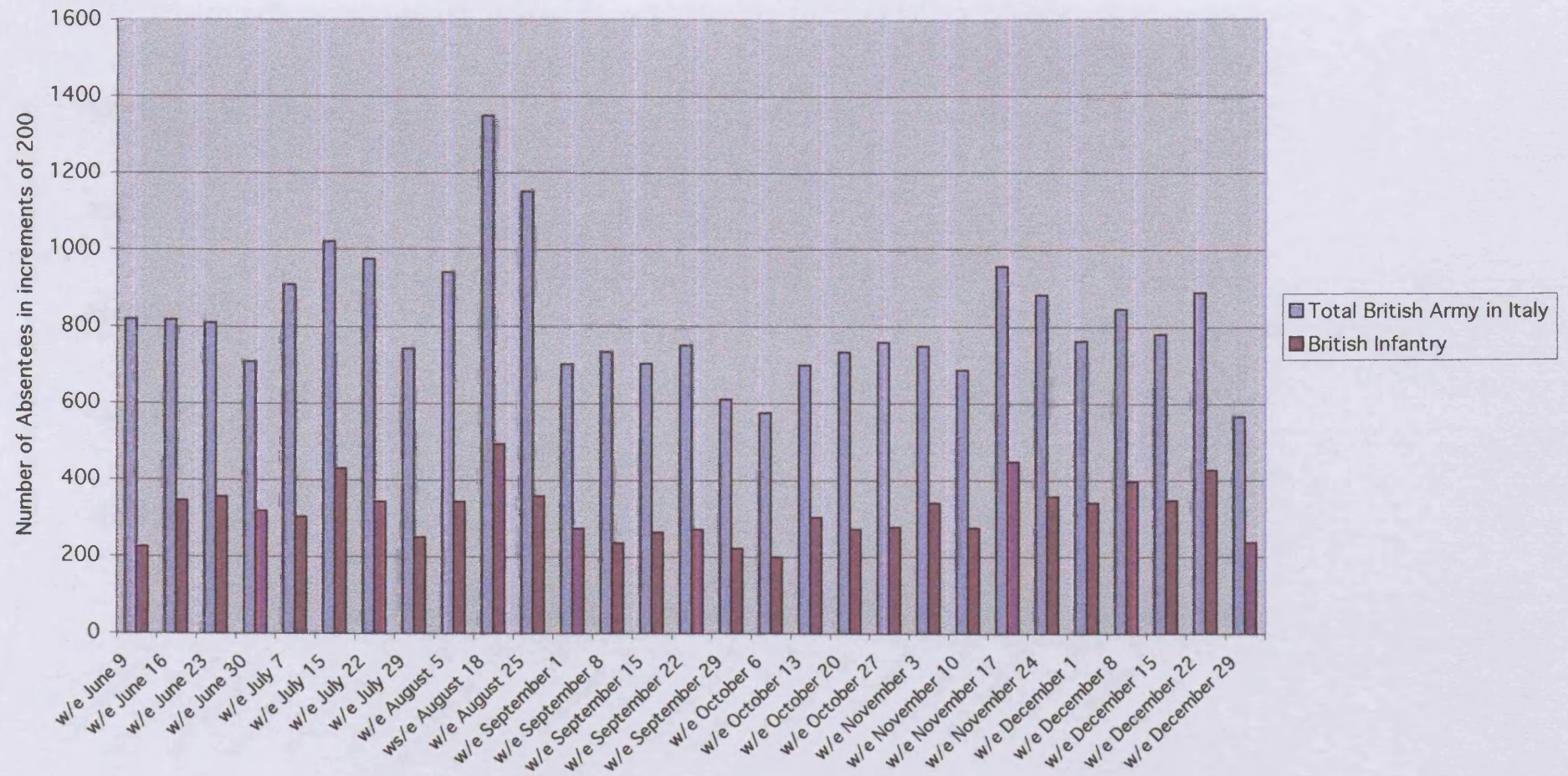


COMPARISON OF ABSENTEES:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JANUARY-JUNE 1944



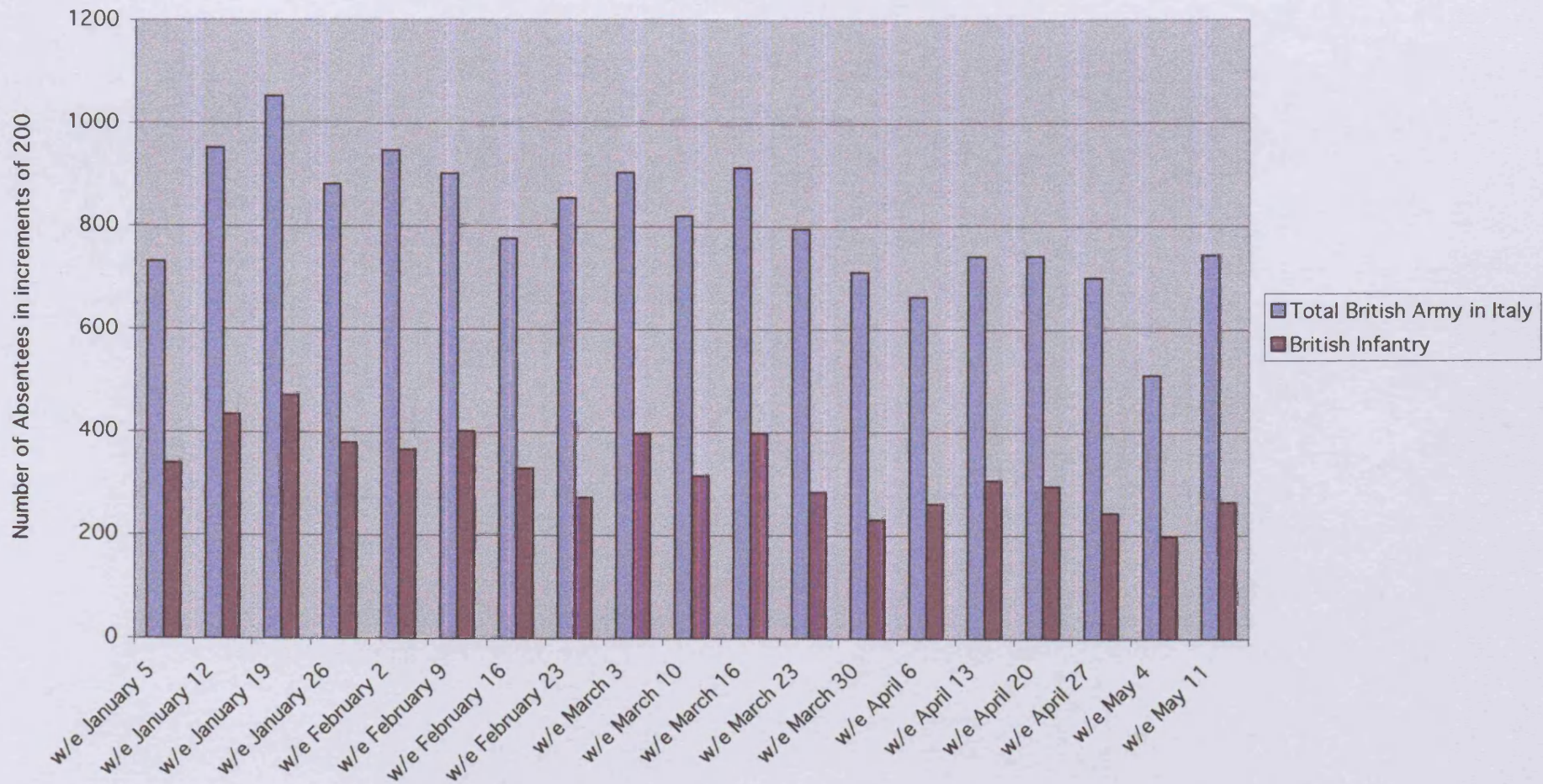


COMPARISON OF ABSENTEES:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JUNE-DECEMBER 1944





COMPARISON OF ABSENTEES:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JANUARY-MAY 1945

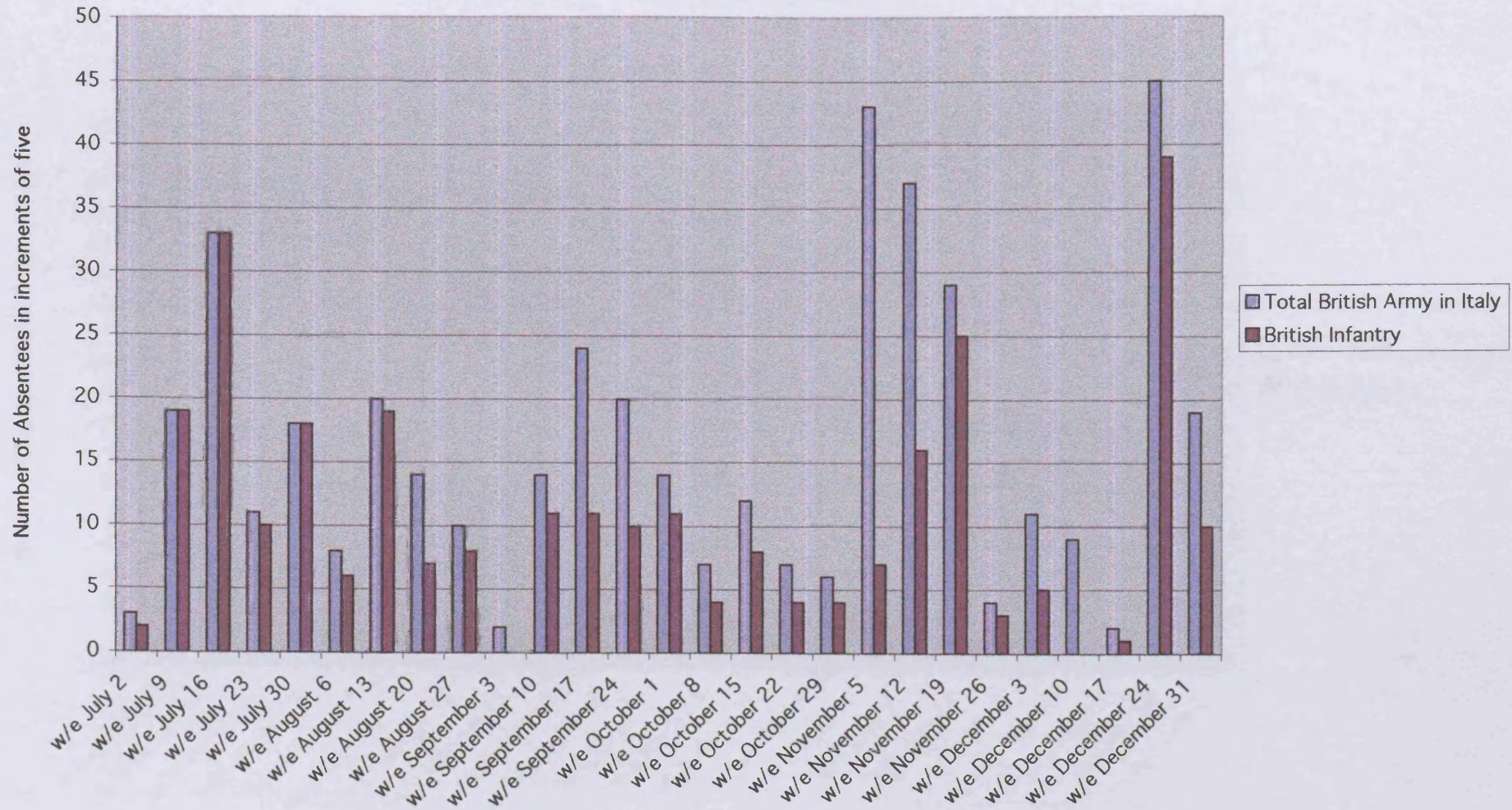


### **APPENDIX III**

#### **Comparison of Deserters: Infantry and Total British Army in Italy July 1943-May 1945**

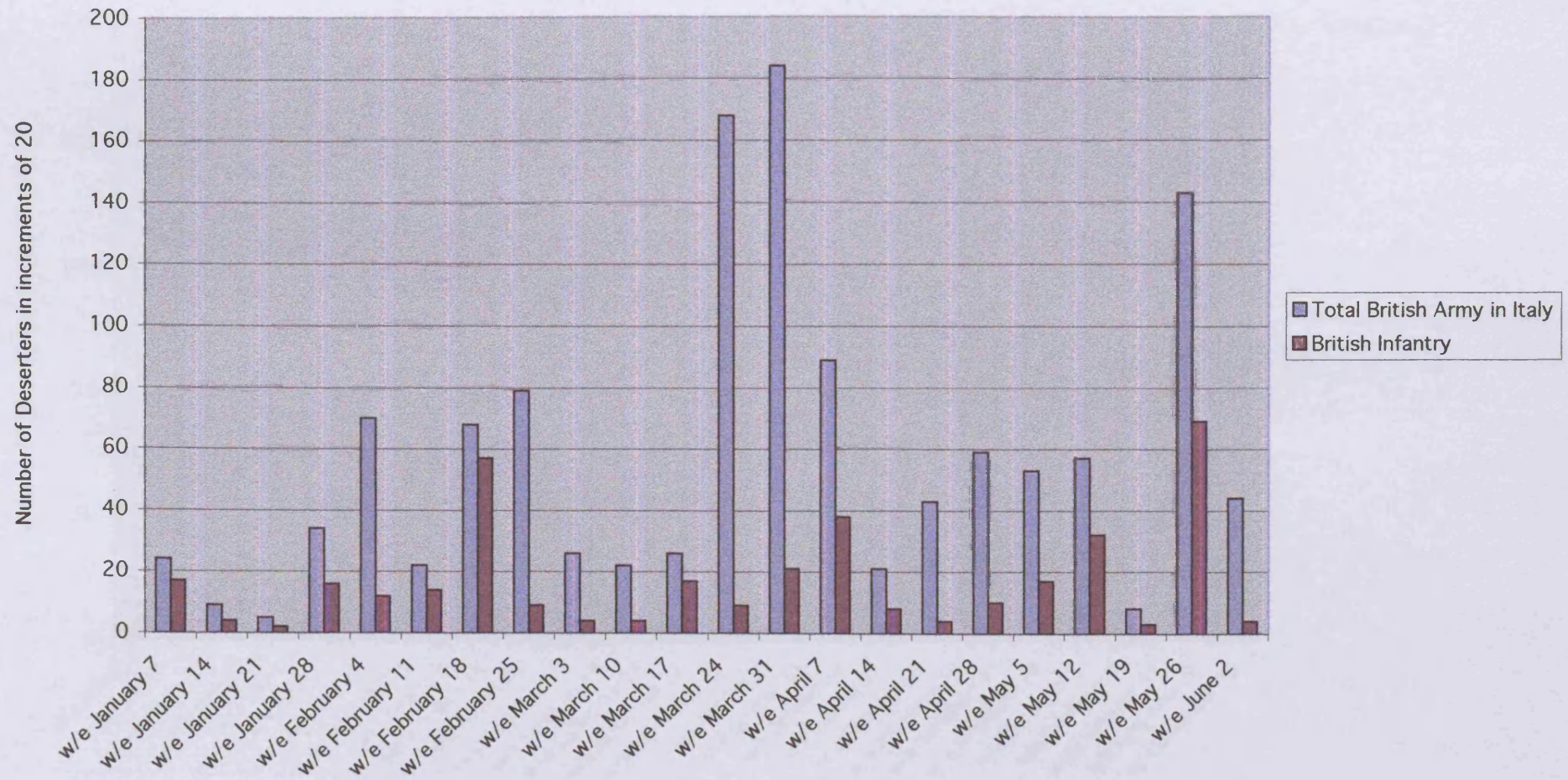


COMPARISON OF DESERTERS:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JULY-DECEMBER 1943



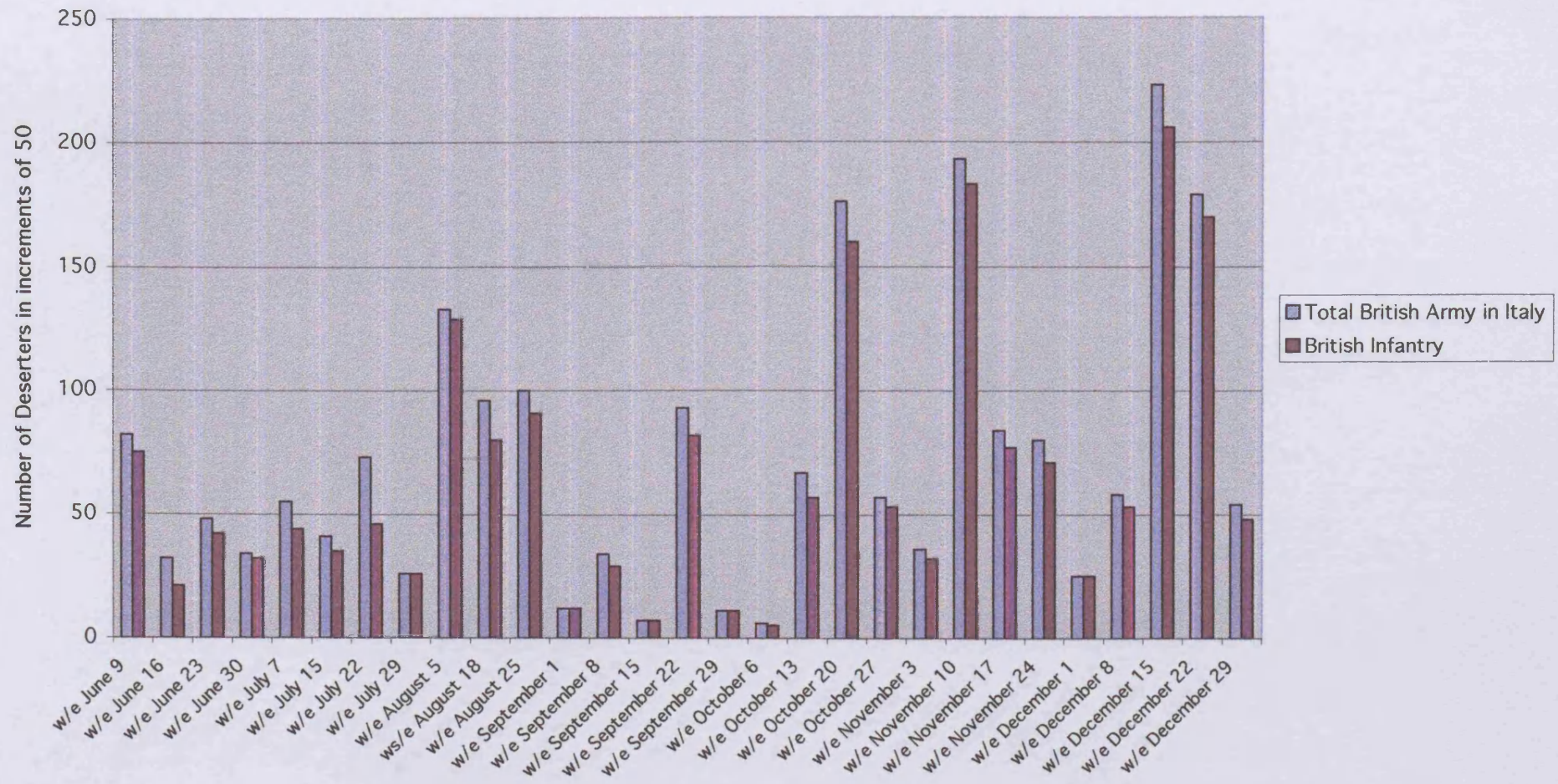


COMPARISON OF DESERTERS:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JANUARY-JUNE 1944



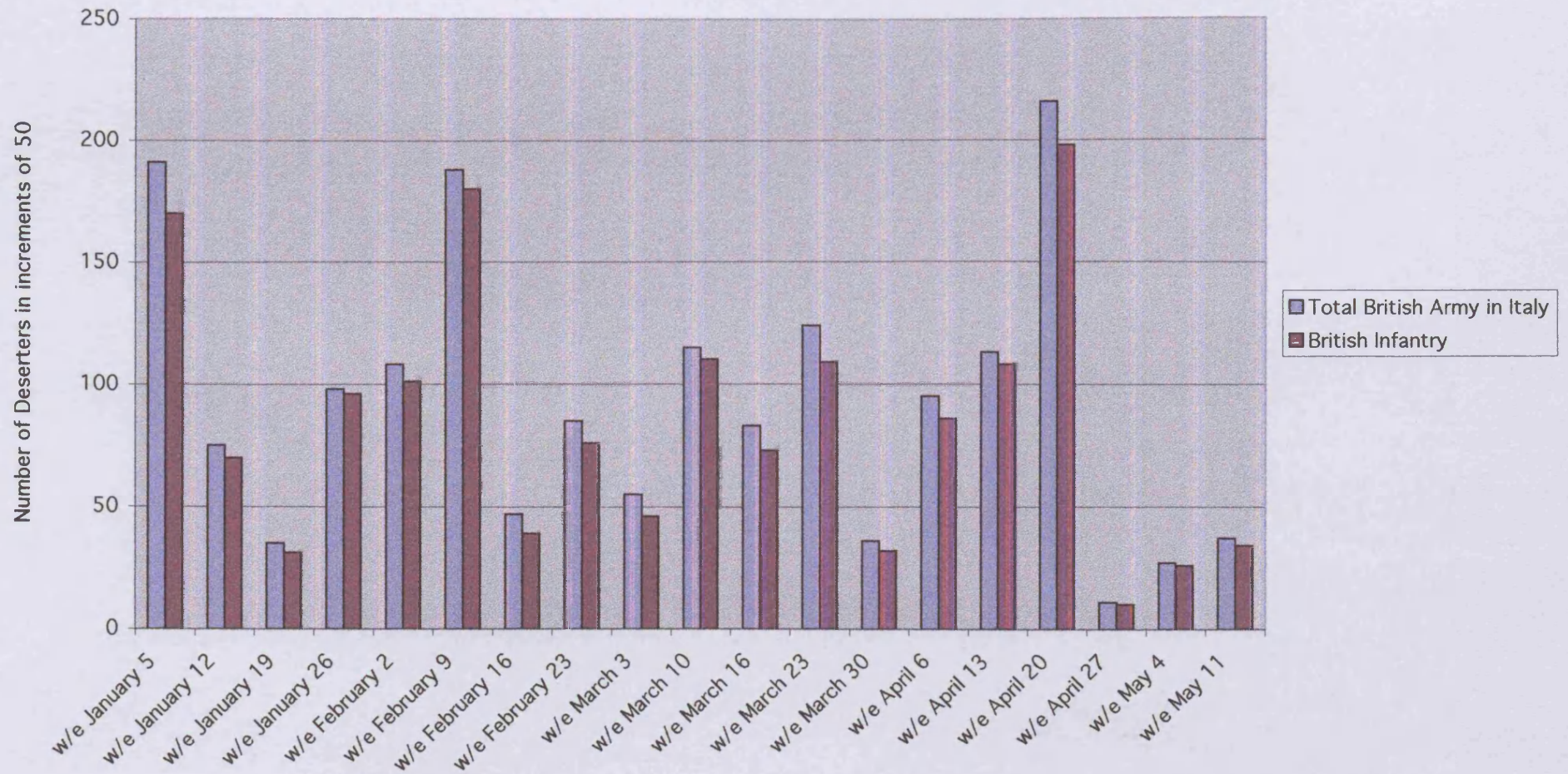


COMPARISON OF DESERTERS:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JUNE-DECEMBER 1944





COMPARISON OF DESERTERS:  
INFANTRY AND TOTAL BRITISH ARMY IN ITALY  
JANUARY-MAY 1945

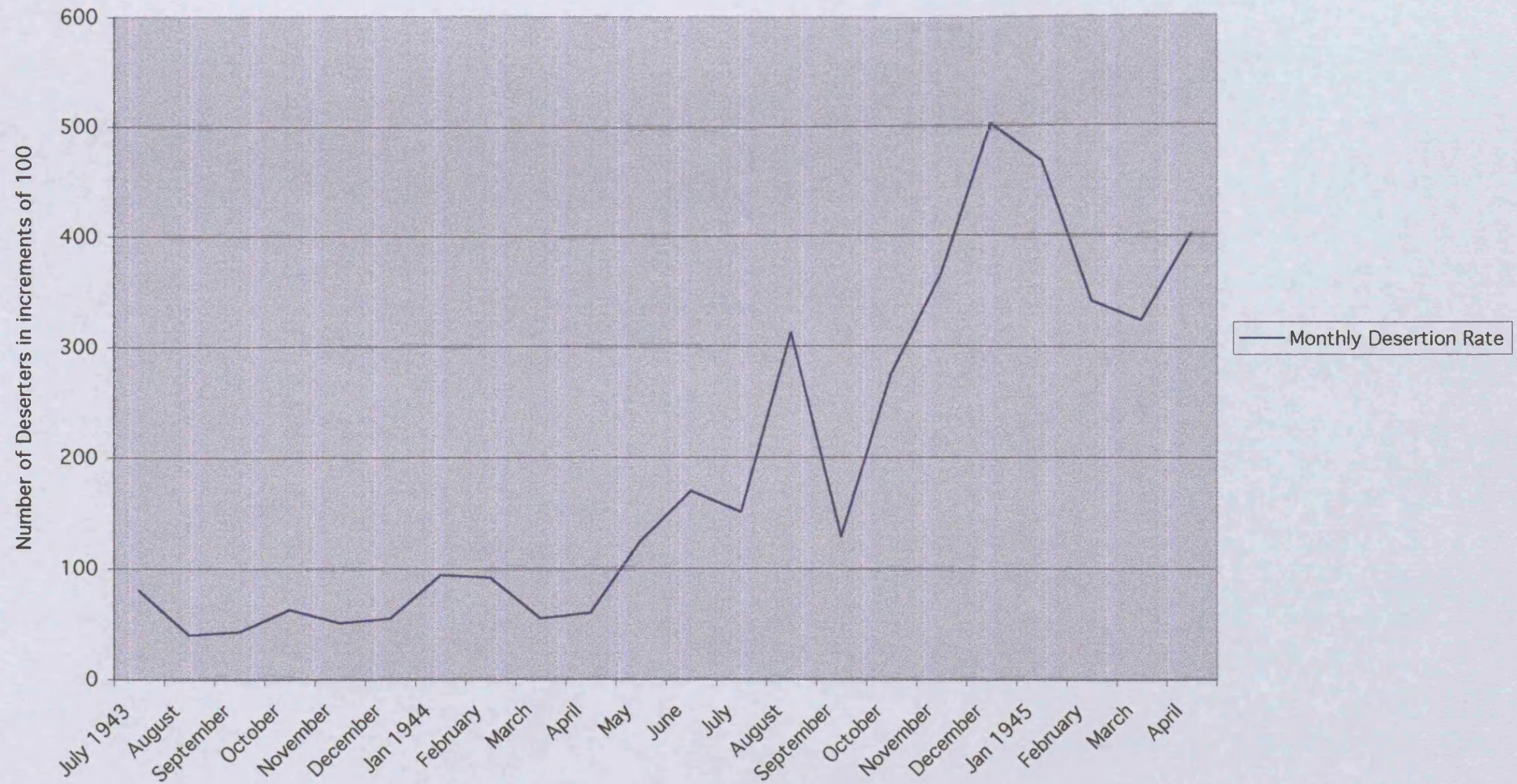


## **APPENDIX IV**

### **Infantry Desertion in Italy July 1943-April 1945**



INFANTRY DESERTION:  
JULY 1943-APRIL 1945





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